When celebs try wakeboarding
LIFESTYLE / C1

RP seen avoiding recession this year
BUSINESS / B1

41,000 jobs in Visayas, Luzon
ACROSS / A19

A 15-INCH "hammerhead," dubbed the "Million Dollar Baby," is rescued in Pilar, Sorsogon, on Saturday. CONTRIBUTED PHOTO

NEDAILY
INQUIRER
BALANCED NEWS, FEARLESS VIEWS
Tuesday, March 10, 2009 ✦ 3 sections / Vol. 24 / No. 92 P18 www.inquirer.net

'Smallest' biggest fish rescued in Sorsogon

By Nikko Dizon

A 15-INCH-LONG WHALE SHARK, considered by the nature conservation group WWF-Philippines as the smallest "hammerhead" ever, was rescued over the weekend in Sorsogon.

Jose Ma. Lorenzo Tan, WWF-Philippines vice chair and chief executive of- SMALLEST / A6

Cash, house for SEC official

Legacy CEO discloses gifts to Commissioner Martinez

By Christine O. Avendaño

A PRENEED COMPANY OF THE COLLAPSED LEGACY Group bought a house and lot at BF Homes Subdivision in Parañaque City for P5 million that a Securities and Exchange Commission (SEC) official gave to his son, a top executive of the firm said yesterday.

Testifying at the resumption of the Senate inquiry into the troubled preneed industry, Carolina Hilvola, chief executive officer of the now closed Legacy Consolidated Plans Inc. (LCPI), identified the SEC official as Commissioner Jesus Martinez.

The Legacy Group's shuttered preneed firms have obligations of P1.1 billion to some 80,000 plan holders.

Another LCPI executive said the preneed firm also paid Parañaque Rep. Edcarole Zialcita P5.8 million in consultancy fees.

Martinez acknowledged at the hearing that Zialcita was his several cousin.

Hilvola said Martinez had called her up last year to "follow up the payment by Legacy to Mr. Michael Lato (vendor of the house and lot) that was supposed to be Commissioner Martinez's gift to his son."

She said the preneed firm ended up buying the house and lot at No. 7 Quezon St. in BF Classic Homes from Lato in April 2008.

"The ownership of this house and lot was later transferred to Commissioner Martinez's son," Hilvola said.

She also claimed that upon the in- CEOs / A10

PARAÑAQUE Rep. Eduardo Zialcita says the P1.2 million he received from the Legacy Group were donations. MICHAEL VARCAS

SEC COMMISSIONER Jesus Martinez reacts after a Legacy officer accuses him of accepting a house and lot and P1.2 million for a Ford Expedition bought from him by the Legacy group. JEFF ZURBANO

CELSO de los Angeles, founder of the failed Legacy Group, examines checks he reportedly received from his own company during the continuation of the Senate hearing on the preneed industry on Monday.

CAROLINA Hilvola, Legacy CEO, shows a check in the name of Celso de los Angeles. PHOTOS BY JEFF ZURBANO

LEGACY chief finance officer Hermenia Santos says De los Angeles used company funds for personal expenses.

SEC CHAIR Fe Barin denies water after the latest blow to the corporate regulator which has been in hot water during the Senate hearing. JEFF ZURBANO

3 victims ask: Where's our money?

By Philip C. Tubeza

THE SENATE INVESTIGATION OF the Legacy Group turned emotional yesterday after three plan holders finally got the chance to confront Celso de los Angeles, the "financial wizard" they blamed for their money that has disappeared.

Widowed street vendor Josita "Nanay Ikoh" Calleja, 68; housewife Aurora S. Soriano, 59; and retired office worker Milagros "Aling Mila" Villanueva, 65, all praised De los Angeles, the Legacy Group founder, on how their money INVESTORS / A10

DACER-CORBITO MURDER

DOJ: Mancao affidavit in bank vault

By Norman Bordadora

THE AFFIDAVIT IS NOW KEPT IN A bank vault, and Justice Secretary Raul Gonzalez says it contains information that would astonish the enamored.

"It is quite strong," Gonzalez said yesterday, adding that the affidavit executed by former Senior Supt. Cesar Mancao II implicates "several" personalities—some strongly, others not so—in the 2000 killings of publicist Salvador "Bubby" Dacer and his driver, Emmanuel Corbito.

"Mancao (They are high up)," Gonzalez said, when asked how high in stature the people Mancao purportedly links to the double murder. Dacer and Corbito were strangled to death and their bodies torched and buried in Cavite.

"It (the affidavit) is in a bank vault."

Twenty-one people are charged with the double murder in the Manila Regional Trial Court. They included Mancao, former Senior Supt. Michael Ray Aquino and former Supt. Glenn Dumlao.

Mancao, Aquino and Dumlao—who DOJ: MANCAO / A6

Ships lie idle on Subic Bay as global trade slows

SUBIC BAY FREEPORT—IT'S 11 A.M. on a weekday but huge, bulky cargo ships scattered at the major Philippine port are quiet and nearly deserted, save for a handful of workers repainting chipped handrails on some vessels.

About 22 ships—mostly empty cargo vessels—have anchored in this former US naval base, some as long as three months running.

It's cheaper than most other ports in the region to park a ship and most crews are dominated by Filipinos so it's a popular choice.

Before August last year, when the global economic crisis started to stymie trade, cargo ships rarely stayed in Subic for more than a week. At any one time there were no more than 10 SHIPS / A11

Clenched fist mars Ombudsman's party

By Vick Contreras

THE LONG-RUNNING FEUD BEtween Ombudsman Merceditas Gutierrez and Special Prosecutor Dennis Villa-Ignacio took a nastier, "bare-knuckled" turn yesterday—and it was all for everyone to see during their agency's weekly flag-raising ceremony.

Villa-Ignacio made heads turn CLENCHED / A6

US recession may be longest in postwar period

WASHINGTON—DOCTORS' JOBS DISappeared. Inflation soared. Unemployment climbed to alarming levels. The hungry lined up at soup kitchens.

It wasn't the Great Depression of the 1930s. It was the 1981-82 recession, widely considered America's worst since the depression.

That painful time during Ronald Reagan's presidency is a grim marker of how bad things can get. Yet the current recession could slice deeper into the US economy.

If it lasts into April—as it almost surely will—this one will go on record as the longest in the postwar era. The 1981-82 and 1973-75 recessions each lasted 16 months.

Unemployment has not reached 1982 levels and the gross domestic product (GDP) has not fallen quite as far. But the hurt from this recession is spread more widely, and uncertainty about the country's economic health is worse today than it was in 1982.

"It's not only that the downturn is sharp and widespread, but a lot of people worry that it's going to be a long-lasting, substantial downturn," said US RECESSION / A11

ADB: World financial markets lost $50 trillion

THE GLOBAL CRISIS HAS WIPED A staggering $50 trillion off the value of financial assets last year, including $9.6 trillion of losses in developing Asia alone, according to the Asian Development Bank (ADB).

"This is by far the most serious crisis to hit the world economy since the Great Depression," ADB President Haruhiko Kuroda said even as he predicted Asia would be "one of the first regions to emerge from it."

In a study commissioned by the Manila-based lender on the impact of the financial crisis on emerging economies, the ADB estimated the value of financial assets worldwide—currency, equity and bond markets—dropped by $50 trillion in 2008.

Financial asset losses in developing Asia, which has suffered more than other emerging markets, amounted to $9.6 trillion—or just over one year's worth of developing Asia's gross domestic product.

"The previous areas of strength and interdependability is now gone," the ADB- ADB: WORLD / A4

sponsored study said, noting that "there were concerns about the effect of a shallow recession in the United States, but the general perception was that Asia, the largest regional emerging market group, was doing well."

"The loss of financial wealth is enormous," said the study titled "Global Fi-

Second FRONTPAGE

WEATHER FORECAST

4D 6 13 6 23

SUERTRES 1 1 4 / 4 0 1

FOUR DIGIT 1 8 5 7 / 7 1 6

MEGALOTTO 6/45 10 28 31 33 41 45 P25,581,960.00

Solons urge probe of rebel kin's death

Palace assures relatives of slain daughter of NPA leader they'll get justice

By Lolit D. Salaverria and Christian V. Esguerra

THE OUTRAGE THAT HAS ERUPTED OVER THE BRUTAL killing of Rubelyn Pitao, the daughter of a communist rebel leader, has sparked calls in the House of Representatives for an investigation of the incident and of military officers who may have been involved.

Wednesday, yesterday also caused the family of the slain 20-year-old teacher that those behind the murder—especially if they were out to kill Rubelyn's mother—would be punished.

Representatives Satur Ocampo and Teodoro Casiño, of the party-list Bayan Muna, yesterday filed a resolution calling for an investigation of the murder, noting that Pitao's relatives had pointed to the military as the perpetrator.

"It is hereby resolved that the Committee on Human Rights conduct an investigation, in aid of legislation, on the condemnable brutal abduction, torture and extrajudicial killing of Rubelyn Pitao, allegedly perpetrated by the 10th Infantry Division of the Armed Forces of the Philippines," the lawmakers said in the resolution.

Pitao, a substitute teacher at St. Peter's College in Turil, Davao City, and daughter of Leonisio Pitao, also known as Commander Parago of the New People's Army, was abducted on March 6 while on her way home.

The next day her body, which bore torture marks, including five stab wounds, was found near an irrigation ditch in Barangay Sta Isabel, Carmen, Davao del Norte. Her mother's was covered with packing tape and her pants had been pulled halfway down.

According to Ocampo, the young Pitao's relatives pointed to the Army's 10th Infantry Division as being responsible for the murder since it had the capability, means and motive to retaliate against her father by hunting his loved ones.

The 10th Infantry Division has denied any involvement in the incident.

Presidential Peace Adviser Ariellen Ramon said people should desist from drawing any conclusions until the investigations of the Armed Forces and the Philippine National Police had been completed.

At the same, the government appealed to the National Democratic Front not to let the incident affect ongoing efforts to resume the stalled peace negotiations.

"If military agents are responsible for the killing, rest assured they will be punished," Ramon told reporters.

Lorelei Fajardo, deputy presidential spokesperson, also assured the Pitao family justice would be served.

Despite the violent nature of the incident, Ramon said it should be treated as an "isolated" case in the wider context of the peace process.

"I don't see any reason why the peace negotiations should not resume," he said. "The government is taking action. That's why President Macapagal-Arroyo ordered the military and the police to look into the killing."

Fajardo admitted that Pitao's murder was most unwelcome, especially amid the moves administration's efforts to improve its poor human rights record.

Palace to bestow medal on Francis Magalona

MALACAÑANG IS SET TO GIVE THE "Master Rapper" a posthumous award.

The Presidential Medal of Merit will be awarded to the late Francis Magalona for his "contributions in promoting patriotism and nationalism among the youth," it was announced by Lorelei Fajardo, deputy presidential spokesperson.

Magalona, 44, passed away Friday after losing leukemia. He is survived by his wife Pia and three eight children.

Fajardo said the Palace was trying to arrange for President Macapagal-Arroyo to personally hand the posthumous award to the Magalona family.

"The President recognizes the contribution of Francis Magalona, through his music, in promoting patriotism and nationalism, especially to the youth," she said in a press briefing.

She said Mr. Arroyo was not unfamiliar with the music of Magalona, hailed as the "King of Pinoy Hip."

"She's not familiar with 'Mga Kaibigan Ko'" she said, referring to Magalona's immensely popular patriotic rap.

Magalona's passing has moved even militant lawmakers, who hailed the rap artist for his music that inspired countless artists and ordinary folk.

Bayan Muna Representatives Satur Ocampo and Teodoro Casiño yesterday filed a resolution asking the House of Representatives to resolve with the family and fans of Magalona, noting his many achievements as a songwriter, producer, news director and photographer.

"His rap songs were social commentaries with nationalistic and patriotic themes that inspired many activists and ordinary folk," the lawmakers said in their resolution.

He received numerous awards for his music. he was a popular TV host yet he remained a man in touch with reality, they added. **Christian V. Esguerra and Lolit D. Salaverria**

Detained Smith beats recession, gets a job

By Tarra Quismundo

WITH LOTS OF IDLE TIME ON HIS hands, the US Marine convicted of raping a Filipina woman three years ago has put on the pounds. And, despite the global economic crisis, he has found a clerical job to keep himself busy while awaiting the verdict on his appeal.

Confined to the US Embassy compound despite a contempt ruling by the Supreme Court a month ago, Lance Cpl. Daniel Smith has been allowed to draft correspondence for the embassy in a furnished container van in the compound on Roxas Boulevard, according to Interior Undersecretary Marina Corpus.

Corpus checked on Smith on March 5 and refuted details of his visit to reporters yesterday.

It has been a month since the Supreme Court ruled that Smith must be held in a Philippine facility while appealing his conviction. The Department of Interior and Local Government (DILG) has yet to receive word about the court-ordered RP/US arrangements of Smith's custody.

"Within his area of confinement, he is given clerical jobs... he is asked to check some papers just to keep his mind busy. And, as I recommended, (he is allowed) more physical exercise because he might have a heart attack there," Corpus said.

Smith's lawyer, Jose Sonidito, said he was not aware of his client's clerical duties at the embassy as he had not visited the Marine in months.

Corpus also says Smith on Feb. 3, a week before the Supreme Court ruled on his US custody, which was questioned by the victim, "Nicole." During that visit, embassy officials asked Corpus if they would need to inform Smith "so he will not decolorize physically." The DILG agreed on condition that he would remain in his quarters.

"Basically, he is asked to write correspondence. If he has to deliver papers from embassy office within the compound," he is escorted," he said.

Assumption Museum

ASSUMPTION COLLEGE WILL INAUGURATE today the Mother Maria Angela Formation Center and Assumption College Museum on the San Lorenzo Village campus. A Mass in celebration of the feast of St. Marie Eugenie of Jesus will be said at 5 p.m. in the Chapel of Our Lady of the Assumption. Alumni and friends of the college have been invited to the affair.

Hunt on again for 'link' in Ninoy murder

JUSTICE SECRETARY RAUL GONZALEZ is once again hoping to nail Capt. Felipe Valerio, the officer who was in the military van into which Aviation Security Command soldiers threw former Sen. Benigno Aquino Jr. after he was shot at the Manila International Airport on Aug. 21, 1983.

Gonzalez, at the Thursday's ar-

Ombudsman as the time was at the forefront of prosecution efforts when the administration of President Corazon Aquino reopened the case of the murders of Aquino and his purported assassin, Rolando Galman, in April 1986. He (Abad) has failed to have Valerio extradited from the United States.

"There must be a new preliminary investigation for him only," Gonzalez told reporters.

Valerio was not arraigned when the case was reopened. He fled to the US and was never brought before the Sandiganbayan which tried the soldiers.

Gonzalez said "it will be a little difficult" to get Valerio this time. "That will depend first on whether we know where he is, whether he has not changed his name," he said. Valerio is believed to be working as a commercial pilot in the US.

President Macapagal-Arroyo had ordered the Department of Justice to work for the extradition of Valerio, said to be the link between the assassin and the conspiracy behind the Aquino assassination.

Norman Bordadora

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SGS Philippines Division Manager Roger Villanueva presents the ISO Certification to COOP NATCCO Corp. Jose R. Pingoy (second from left) as NATCCO Chairperson Reynaldo A. Gundiamo and NATCCO CEO Crescente C. Pura look on

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Melo to Comelec critics: Don't derail poll automation

By Kristine L. Alave

HAUNTED BY THE COMMISSION on Elections's failure to computerize past elections, Comelec Chair Jose Melo yesterday appealed for those opposed to the decision to use the Precinct Counting Optical Scan (PCOS) system, or optical mark reader, to accept the decision and not derail the automation process.

Melo said he hoped the advocates of other poll technology options would not throw legal hurdles to the Comelec's easy so it could accomplish its mission of automating the May 2010 elections.

Comelec commissioners could be impeached if they did not carry out the full automation of next year's polls, said members of Congress, who last week approved the Comelec's P11.3 billion supplemental budget for the purpose.

The Comelec failed to automate the 2004 elections after the Supreme Court annulled the awarding of the contract for poll machines to the Mega Pacific consortium due to flawed bidding procedures.

Melo, in a press briefing, expressed fears critics would find flaws in the bidding process and again kill the plan to automate the elections.

"They is what we fear. They may derail the system. They may delay the process," the poll chair said, adding the plan to use the PCOS was studied and recommended by the Comelec advisory council.

"A decision has been made by us. Let us not complicate the situation. Let the process proceed," Melo added.

The PCOS requires voters to indicate their choices by shading an oval space beside candidates' names. The ballots are then counted by the machines, already in use in some examinations. Comelec officials said the system was chosen because it left a paper trail, a hard copy ballot.

The opponents were advocates of another technology known as the computerized Open Election System (OES) which they claimed was cheaper and more transparent than the counting system the Comelec chose. Dan Lagman, an OES backer, said the election system developed by University of the Philippines engineers and programmers was better because it allowed everyone to access the read-only results on the Internet.

At any rate, Melo said, the Comelec would release the terms of reference (TOR) for a new bidding process next week and solicit the final bidding in order to ensure total transparency in the process.

House Majority Leader Arthur Defensor said that once the Comelec used up the P11.3 billion allocated by Congress for poll automation, it was duty bound to use the leased computers.

Leaning Tax Guidelines would solve the problem of being stuck with obsolete machines later on, the Comelec had told the congressmen.

"They will be impeached if they do not perform their duties. We don't need a repeat of the Mega-Health computer leases and that involved only a little over P1 billion. This is ten times that... pushing this to court will be a crime," Defensor said. With a report from Gil Cabunoc Jr.

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DOJ: Mancao affidavit in bank vault

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ian all now in custody in the United States—are former members of the Presidential Anti-Organized Crime Task Force (PAOCTF) headed by then Philippine National Police chief and now Sen. Panfilo Lacson.

Dumlao executed a handwritten affidavit on his jet en back on June 12, 2003, claiming that then President Joseph Estrada's Malacañang Palace and Lacson may have known of the "special operation" that led to the killings of Dacer and his driver. The "special operation" supposedly called for the abduction of Dacer in order to extract information from him about the opposition plans at the time.

Both Estrada and Lacson have repeatedly denied any hand in the abduction and in the killings.

More legal battles

At the time Dumlao executed his 2003 affidavit, Estrada was already out of power.

The case got further muddled in 2005 when Dumlao executed another affidavit saying he was forced by other PNP officers to fabricate his 2003 statement in order to implicate Lacson and the others in the murders.

Gonzalez has refused to release the contents of the Mancao affidavit.

He said Mancao signed his "voluntarily detailed" affidavit at the Philippine Consulate in Florida, where he is facing lethal crime in his possible extradition to the Philippines.

Asked if Mancao's affidavit pointed to the mastermind of the murders, Gonzalez said: "If I am appreciating the evidence ... yes. Maybe for the purposes of filing the case."

He added: "Many legal battles will still come out of this."

Close-knit group

Why does he think Mancao's allegations in his affidavit are strong?

"Mancao is part of a close-knit group. He first flung with the commanders of ... Glenn Dumlao. There is a series of circumstances that will make it a strong contention," Gonzalez said.

He said Mancao's affidavit was signed in the presence of a Filipino consul presumably in the Florida jail where the former PNP officer is detained while waiting to be extradited to the Philippines.

Gonzalez said he needed to keep the Mancao affidavit in a bank safe "because of the sensitivity of the affidavit and the implications that it can have for some people."

"I don't think I can be forgiven if that document gets lost," he added.

MANCAO

E-mail from wife

Gonzalez expressed hope that Mancao wouldn't take back the statements he made in his affidavit.

He said, however, that securing wouldn't do the former police officer any good since doing so would make Mancao contradict the information contained in e-mail that Mancao's wife had sent to Gonzalez.

"I am confident that he will not recant. Because I don't think it will do him any good. If he will recant, he will not get the benefit of being a state witness. He can be convicted here," Gonzalez said.

In a previous interview, Gonzalez said docu mail he received from Mancao's wife was consistent with what Dumlao had said in his 2003 affidavit.

Gonzalez, nonetheless, said the the appreciation of the evidence given by Mancao was up to the courts.

"Again I would stress that when the matter reaches the court, we don't know how the court will react," he said.

GONZALEZ

Not implicated

Lacson said at the weekend he had not seen the Mancao affidavit but he believed his former aide had not implicated him in the slayings, based on what he learned from those who were privy to its contents.

What would be worrisome was if Mancao was pressured to distort the truth, he said.

Mancao was taken into custody by US authorities in April 2006 as a wit ness in a separate case involving Michael Ray Aquino. Accused of possessing several US intelligence documents, Aquino pleaded guilty later that year and was sentenced to more than six years in prison.

Mancao was released a week after he was taken into custody, but arrested again in 2008 on conviction charges.

Dacer and Corbito were abducted on Dasmariñas Highway and Zobel Roxas Street in Bel-Air Makati on Nov. 24, 2000. Their remains were recovered a month later in Cavite and identified by forensic experts based on their dental records and personal effects. With a report from Elisa Pulmano, Inquirer Research

ADB: World financial markets lost $50 trillion

First page A1

nancial Turmoil and Emerging Market Economies: Major Contagion and Shocking Loss of Wealth."

"In united earlier, the loss of wealth at a worldwide level may amount to an astounding $50 trillion, or one year's worth of $20T that comes will have an enormous impact on domestic expenditure."

The study estimated the losses in equity and bond markets, including those based on mortgages and collateralassets, and the depreciation of currencies against the US dollar.

The estimates did not include financial derivatives such as credit default swaps that further multiplied the size of the financial markets.

Asia hit harder

Haruhiko Kuroda, ADB president, said Asia was hit harder than other parts of the developing world because its markets had expanded more rapidly. In Latin America, losses of financial markets were estimated at $2.1 trillion.

From South Korea to Taiwan to Singapore, exports have plunged by double digits in recent months as American and European consumers spent less on cars and gadgets.

On Monday, Japanese data showed the world's second-largest economy swung to its first current account deficit in 13 years in January as exports collapsed.

Japan incurred a record current account deficit, with the current surplus tumbling almost a third from a year earlier, as the global recession crushed export demand and income from overseas investments.

The contraction in Japan's main export markets has pushed firms such as Toyota Motor Corp. and Sony Corp. deep into the red, prompting job and production cuts and sowing the uncertainty on course for its longest recessions in modern times.

"We have seen the declines in exports, and cuts we see the income balance declining because the global financial crisis is cutting earnings on investment overseas," said Akira Shinkawa, senior economist at UBS.

"This is a bad development for an export-oriented economy," he said.

Close connections

According to the ADB study, the figures provide clear proof of the close connections between markets and economies around the world, leaving less, if any, countries immune to financial or economic fallout.

A recovery can only now be envisaged for late 2009 or early 2010. "The adverse things may get worse before they get any better," Kuroda said.

A sprawling region, developing Asia includes 44 countries from the remote Asian republics to China to the Pacific islands. The bank had earlier projected the region's growth to slow to 5.6 percent this year from an estimated 6.9 percent last year.

Kuroda said the impact of the crisis could result in a spike in unemployment, slower growth rates and depressed stock markets.

Tight liquidity and credit could also hit small and medium enterprises. It drag in remittances from overseas workers, which has been fueling domestic consumption in countries like the Philippines and Indonesia, could remove important social safety nets, Kuroda said.

He said the ADB had responded by stepping up access to loans, grants and credit guarantees by several billion dollars from the originally planned $12 billion for 2009. Report by from AP and Reuters

Clenched fist mars Ombudsman's party

First page A1

when he raised a clenched fist during the singing of a patriotic song in an early morning program where the employees were supposed to receive a dose of support for Gutierrez, who is facing an impeachment complaint in the House of Representatives.

Later in an Inquirer interview, Villa-Ignacio confirmed he was called by Gutierrez to one of the offices on the ground floor shortly after the gathering and that she "berated" him "apparently for raising the protests."

"But I remember that that is how it was sung in the past," Villa-Ignacio said of his defiant gesture when he sang "Bayan Ko," a patriotic song. (But an employee, who was also present at the flag-raising, said Villa-Ignacio may have clenched "Bayan Ko" with assertive hymn, "Pilipinas Kong Mahal.")

Villa-Ignacio said he attended Monday's flag ceremony at the Ombudsman's main office on Agham Road in Quezon City "not knowing it was to be a show of support" for the embattled Gutierrez.

'What's your purpose?'

A highlight of the program, he said, was the "unveiling of a large billboard which you can see all the way from Diliman" encouraging support for Gutierrez.

The special prosecutor holds office at the Sandiganbayan building in Commonwealth Avenue also in Quezon City.

"I was about to leave (for the Sandiganbayan) when they stopped my car," he recalled.

Villa-Ignacio said the Ombudsman quickly questioned his presence at the ceremony.

"Bakit di pa pumapasok si sir? Ano't di pa tayo nagsisimula? (Why are you here? You have never attended before). What's your purpose?" Villa-Ignacio quoted Gutierrez as telling him.

"I'm being castigated for attending and sometimes for not attending. I'm confused," Villa-Ignacio told the Inquirer. "I courteously asked permission to leave (the office) because I would not allow myself to be harassed unnecessarily."

'Overacting'

But another prosecutor gave a different version of the incident, saying Gutierrez actually ordered Villa-Ignacio to a meeting to sort out their differences, but that the latter angrily insisted on holding a "public hearing" on an otherwise internal problem.

Villa-Ignacio, after "tossing around the head" and refusing to answer Gutierrez directly, walked out of the meeting, said Prosecutor Rubenson Uy.

A media adviser of the Office of the Ombudsman relayed the inquiry to Uy when this reporter sought a comment from Gutierrez.

Uy said he believed Villa-Ignacio's "disturbed flag" had nothing to do with the meeting Gutierrez called after the ceremony. "There was no problem with that."

Hearing overacting long memos from

REPUBLIC OF THE PHILIPPINES
COMMISSION ON INFORMATION AND COMMUNICATIONS TECHNOLOGY
NATIONAL TELECOMMUNICATIONS COMMISSION

'Smallest' biggest fish rescued

First page A1

Boy said in a statement that the animal was initially reported to have been caught on March 6 and held up in Barangay San Antonio in Pilar town where it was put up for sale.

The next day adherents to Dencil, which "hosts what is arguably the largest known annual congregation of whale sharks in the world," Tan said.

A team of experts and officials, which received the report on March 7, was dispatched to rescue the whale.

"They expected to see a giant animal helplessly stuck, its tail dorsal fin and tail undulating out of the waters. But there was nothing there," Tan narrated.

"All they saw was a stick, stuck in mud, with a small rope leading away from it into the water."

Born in RP?

Elson Aca, WWF's project leader in Dencil, walked up to the stick and Tan said he "was amazed to find the smallest whale shark he had ever seen—a mere 15 inches long!"

The whale shark is the world's biggest fish.

Three hours after it was rescued, Tan said the team released it back to the sea.

Tan surmised that the "Pilar pup was so small" that it might have been born in Philippine waters. He added that it could have been what biologists call a "neonate."

"Not only is this animal the smallest live whale shark on record ever to be captured and released here in the Philippines (and arguably anywhere in the world!), it is also the first indication that the Philippines, at the apex of the Coral Triangle, is probably one of the places on the planet where these giants of the sea are born," Tan said.

He noted that scientists had thought of Dencil as a mere "pit station" along the global network of marine highways where whale sharks cruised.

Nursery of the seas

"This new discovery in the fact ever indication that this coastline may actually be a 'birthing site.' This comes as no surprise. After all, all this happened in the Coral Triangle—the nursery of the seas—where life begins, and many things remain possible," Tan said.

The discovery of the whale sharks in Dencil has turned the sleepy town into one of the most popular tourist destinations in the country.

According to Tan, visitor records indicate that over the last six years, 95 percent of tourists that took to Dencil in the season that runs from December to mid-May have been able to interact with the whale sharks.

(Seems like he's just overacting.)," Uy said. "He should differentiate reality from hallucination."

Complaints

In earlier interviews, Villa-Ignacio had accused Gutierrez of being behind moves to harass and force him out of office.

This was after deputy special prosecutors allied with Gutierrez filed administrative complaints against Villa-Ignacio over his frequent absences.

Villa-Ignacio, who became acting ombudsman in 2008, claimed he was being harassed because he was "independent minded" and that his detractors were "hoping I would not be able to finish my term."

Gutierrez denied the allegations, saying it was Villa-Ignacio who had been "underperforming for in the months."

Villa-Ignacio said the harassment began after he publicly attributed the successful prosecution of former military comptroller Carlos Garcia to the "substantial" or strong case filed during the term of Gutierrez's predecessor, Simeon Marcelo, in contrast to the other high-profile graft cases that were dismissed under his watch. With a report from Edson Bandoc

Let '2-course' nurses stay, New Zealand gov't urged

By Jerome Aning

FILIPINO MIGRANT GROUPS IN NEW Zealand have launched online petitions calling on the Wellington government to review a new ruling that unconscionably denies registration to Filipino nurses who obtained their degrees in the Philippines in less than four years.

The petitions, launched by Philippine Nurses Speak Out! (PNSO), call on the Nursing Council of New Zealand to give Filipino nurses a fairer assessment, saying some some of them graduate early because that is their second college course.

According to Ruby Lat of PNSO, Filipino "second courser" nurses include those who obtain degrees in Biology, Psychology, Business, Medicine and other allied courses before taking up Nursing, first they already had earned credits and are able to graduate in less than four years.

One petition (http://www.petitions.com/petition/philnursespeakout) is for the affected nurses, while the other (http://www.petitions.com/petition/supportphilnursespeakout/) is for supporters of their cause.

According to Philippine Ambassador Severnido Tejares, there are about 30 nurses worst-hit by the New Zealand ruling after their applications were rejected.

The Nursing Council's chief executive, Carolyn Reed, had expressed concern the rapid increase in the number of nursing programs in the Philippines may have compromised the quality of nursing graduates.

"We appeal for considerations, especially for the deserved and wanted of Filipino second courser in New Zealand," said the New petition.

There are some 26,000 Filipinos living in New Zealand, of whom 800 are nurses.

Migrants seek probe of OFW's alleged suicide

A FILIPINO MIGRANTS GROUP IN THE Middle East yesterday called on the Philippine government to ensure a thorough investigation of the alleged suicide of an overseas Filipino worker (OFW) in Dubai, United Arab Emirates, Friday night.

Migrante-Middle East identified the OFW as Romulo Corrales, 36, of Calamba City and employed in Dubai by a firm called Agility. He was found hanging in his apartment.

"We can't establish yet the reasons behind his suicide but we suspect it had something to do with his miserable [living] conditions, or probably because of the volatile employment situation in the UAE due to the global financial crisis," said Migrante-ME regional coordinator John Leonard Monterona in a statement e-mailed to the Inquirer.

Monterona, who is based in Saudi Arabia, quoted Migrante-UAE secretary general Mitel Montenegro saying Corrales was experiencing financial difficulties and was about to be relieved from his apartment for nonpayment of rent, which had led to the cutting off of his electricity and water.

"But there may be some other deeper factor that triggered the alleged suicide," said Montes, who lives in the same apartment building as Corrales.

Montes said Corrales was last seen alive by neighbors on Friday afternoon. He was found dead much later at around 11:05 p.m.

Monterona said the Philippine consulate, which is handling the case and preparing to repatriate Corrales's remains, should order an independent autopsy and other procedures to establish the causes for the supposed suicide. Artemio Aning

Pinay in plane crash identified

THE FILIPINO WOMAN WHO SURVIVED the crash of a Turkish Airlines plane at Amsterdam's Schiphol Airport two weeks ago has been named by the Philippine Embassy in The Hague.

In a belated report to the Department of Foreign Affairs (DFA) in Manila, Ambassador Romeo A. Arguelles said Susan Vergara, who works at the United Nations Office in Lebanon, was the only Filipino reported on the plane which crashed as it was about to land at the airport.

Nine people, including the two pilots and an apprentice pilot, were killed and more than 50 passengers were injured.

According to wire reports, the Boeing 737-800, carrying 135 passengers, crashed at 6.30 a.m. more than 3 kilometers from Schiphol, Amsterdam's main airport.

Arguelles said Vergara, who was not injured, was coming to The Hague to help set up the Special Tribunal for Lebanon which opened on March 1.

Arguelles said the embassy learned about Vergara through ABS-CBN Netherlands correspondent Lou Galicia whose family went to visit while in The Hague.

"The embassy is continuously in contact with the appropriate authorities in the Netherlands," Arguelles said.

Initial investigation showed the nose gear may have shot off minutes before the plane was to land, causing it to suddenly drop from the sky. Cynthia D. Rubano

DILG probes local execs over drugs

By Tarra Quismundo

THE DEPARTMENT OF INTERIOR AND Local Government (DILG) has dispatched a 15-man fact-finding team to

check on the role local government officials may be playing in the proliferation of illegal drugs in the country.

Interior Secretary Jose Lina said yesterday the team would try to determine if the sale and use of illegal drugs in local communities was due to official tolerance, neglect or protection.

Cerpas said the team would also look into the possible criminal liability of local government officials who failed to act on illegal drugs cases in their areas.

The DILG inspection is part of the government's intensified anti-drug campaign.

"We don't have specific names (of local officials) because we just started," said Cerpas in a press briefing, flanked by official police reports, the department would call the attention of the local chief executives to drug hotspots in their areas.

"We will give (local executives) a chance to rid their cities and municipalities of illegal drugs. If we think they have not done anything, that's the time we will file (administrative) cases," he said.

"We'll try to answer questions like did they know about drugs operations? And if they did, why didn't they do anything about it," Legal Assistant Secretary Simeon Mosico Jr. told reporters.

"If an official is proven to be a protector, we will file not only administrative but also criminal charges," added Cerpas.

The DILG will also ask the Ombudsman to establish an "express lane" for its legal officers to speed up the filing of cases against erring local officials.

The same policy will apply to police officials who have failed to take effective action against illegal drugs in areas under their command.

Currently, the department is building a case against a Region VI barangay official allegedly involved in the drug trade. Cerpas declined to name the official pending the filing of charges. He said that the department was also investigating whether official incompetence "crept up to higher places."

The DILG reported the seizure of P12.5-million worth of drugs (methamphetamine hydrochloride) and marijuana during police operations from Feb. 1 to 23, and the arrest of 565 alleged pushers and users. Some 524 more drug cases have been filed in court.

The bulk of the drug haul — some 971.1 kilos — was confiscated in Caloocan City, while 1.5 million worth of marijuana — came from the Cordillera in Northern Luzon.

Metro Manila came in second with close to 9 kilos, 300 sachets of shabu seized in various drug raids in 90 days.

House bill would fine hoarders of LPG ₱1M

By Gil Cabacungan Jr.

CONGRESSMEN ARE PROPOSing to stop hoarders of liquefied petroleum gas (LPG) cartels as much as P1 million (in fines and up to two years jail time following the seizure shortage of the cooking fuel which adversely affected Metro Manila households for three months.

Committee on energy chairman Jose Miguel Arroyo, who coauthored House Bill No. 3992, otherwise known as the LPG Act of 2000, said business establishments with an unusually huge volume of LPG in stock, or 50 percent more than their usual inventory, would be guilty of hoarding, especially if they impose quotas or refuse to sell the fuel to the public.

Co-author Agusan del Sur Rep. Rodolfo G. Plaza said the sizings of tough fines and a longer prison sentence would be a more effective deterrent to LPG hoarding.

The bill seeks to impose a fine of from P100,000 to P1 million and imprisonment of six months to two years for traders found to be stocking up on LPG before a price increase or during an artificial shortage.

Operators with an licenses shall be fined P1,000 to P500,000 for each day of operation, while big companies shall be fined P2,000 to P1 million plus imprisonment of from six months to two years.

The measure would also crack down on the impoundment of used or second-hand LPG cylinders and illegal refillers.

Plaza said the stiffer fines should lead to better accountability and responsibility and establish a monitoring and supervising framework in the LPG industry.

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INVITATION TO APPLY FOR ELIGIBILITY AND TO BID

DESCRIPTION	APPROVED BUDGET FOR THE CONTRACT (ABC)
1. Furniture	P[illegible]
2. Textiles	P[illegible]
3. Laboratory Reagents	P[illegible]
4. Medical, Theatre and others	P[illegible]
5. Radiology	P[illegible]
6. Surgical and Medical Supplies	P[illegible]
TOTAL APPROVED BUDGET FOR THE CONTRACT	P[illegible]

(Sgd.) MARIA B. TAGUIBAO, CPA, MB
Bids Chairman

THE DAILY GOSPEL

Sunday, March 14, 2000
2nd Week of Lent

1st Reading: Jer 1:1-10, 17-19
Gospel: Mk 6:1-6

Jesus said to the crowds and to his disciples, "The teachers of the Law and the Pharisees have the seat of Moses. So you should do and observe all they say but do not do as they do, for they do not do what they say. They tie up heavy burdens and load them on the shoulders of the people, but they do not even raise a finger to move them. They do everything in order to be seen by people: they even wear very wide bands of the Law around their foreheads, and robes with huge tassels. They enjoy the first place at feasts and reserved seats in the synagogues, and being greeted in the market-places and being called 'Master' by the people.

"But you, do not let yourselves be called Master, because you have only one Master, and all of you are brothers and sisters. Neither should you call anyone on earth 'Father,' because you have only one Father, he who is in heaven. Nor should you be called 'Instructors,' because Christ is the only teacher for you. Let the greatest among you be the servant of all. For whoever makes himself great shall be humbled; and whoever humbles himself shall be made great."

Commentary:

"Whoever wants to greet us (say, it) hard is to have life." Mohammad Ali said that. Jesus did not. Jesus was God in human form. He never made these lies, which will say that Jesus humbly thought God the only reality for the sin-of-it-humanity. Jesus was God, but there was a sacrifice God, not to take advantage of who he was. Instead, he humbled himself even death, because of our sins. And because he was humble, he is now exalted at the right hand of God.

God calls the humble. He did it to Richelieu. He did it to Mary. He did it to Jesus. All were humble. All were exalted. It's true that we can be exalted or else exalted by power, wealth, and position. But God's way of exaltation is different. It's exaltation. It's prosperity, just as Mother Teresa did discovered. It's a walk all worldly exaltation and possession. But, the exaltation that God gives has forever claimed, maybe day of the resurrection, those who have humbled themselves, before God as well as before their fellows, will share in the exaltation of Jesus Christ. Definitely the humble. That's a promise you can count on!

'Protect women, children'

BOSS, SINGERS and police officers have rallied for reforms in the law specifically crafted to protect women and children from violence, according to the Commission on Human Rights (CHR).

In a statement over the weekend, the CHR called on the police, judiciary and all the pillars of the criminal justice system "to fully apply" Republic Act No. 9262, or the Anti-Violence Against Women and their Children Act of 2004.

"Some judges and police officers have been reluctant to apply this law, feeling it is not applicable to Filipino families. There have been cases of judges urging women to return to husbands who abuse them physically, emotionally or psychologically," the CHR said.

CHR Chair Leila de Lima said the observation was based on reports the commission had received in barangay Mike-Bacon

'Doubting' cabbie helps nail illegal recruiters

A TAXI DRIVER WHO APPLIED for an overseas job was instrumental in uncovering a bogus recruitment agency in Ermita, Manila, which led to the arrest of 14 alleged illegal recruiters.

According to the Film 5 Quite Policy Center, driver Rogelio Orayan did the right thing when he phoned the center to inquire whether the recruitment agency, Rex Placement Service Inc., was legitimate.

Orayan said a woman passenger had suggested two weeks ago that he try his luck at the Ermita-based agency. He filed an application and was told to undergo a medical exam. A few days later, the agency informed Orayan he had been accepted but he needed to make a downpayment of P20,000 out of a P65,000 placement fee.

He was promised a job as a janitor aboard a Dubai-based ship.

Orayan had heard about the Quite Center's campaign against illegal recruitment from a radio program. Just to be sure, he decided the number, 8333337.

It turned out the agency's license had long been cancelled by the Philippine Overseas Employment Agency (POEA), so it continued to charged prospective fees for non-existent jobs here, offices in three different buildings.

Answer to LPG hoarding.

The bill seeks to impose a fine of from P100,000 to P1 million and imprisonment of six months to two years for traders found to be stocking up on LPG before a price increase or during an artificial shortage.

Operators with an licenses shall be fined P1,000 to P500,000 for each day of operation, while big companies shall be fined P2,000 to P1 million plus imprisonment of from six months to two years.

The measure would also crack down on the impoundment of used or second-hand LPG cylinders and illegal refillers.

Plaza said the stiffer fines should lead to better accountability and responsibility and establish a monitoring and supervising framework in the LPG industry.

Jerome Aning and Cynthia S. Balana

Republic of the Philippines
[illegible]

INVITATION TO APPLY FOR ELIGIBILITY AND TO BID

ITEM NO.	DESCRIPTION	QUANTITY	APPROVED BUDGET FOR THE CONTRACT (ABC)	ESTIMATED COST PER UNIT	ESTIMATED TOTAL COST	ABC PER UNIT	ABC TOTAL
[illegible]							

Item	Description	Amount
1	[illegible]	[illegible]
2	[illegible]	[illegible]
3	[illegible]	[illegible]
4	[illegible]	[illegible]
5	[illegible]	[illegible]

Newest Comelec exec gets longer term

By Kristine L. Alave

FORMER MAKATI CITY PROSECUTOR Elias Yusoph was appointed for a second time by the President as a commissioner of the Commission on Elections, this time for a longer term, Comelec Chair Jose Melo said yesterday.

According Melo, the appointment of Yusoph and Commissioner Leonardo Leonida were "unrelated."

Melo said Yusoph's new appointment papers showed he would serve in the poll body until 2015, instead of 2011, which was stipulated in his Jan. 12 appointment documents. He was supposed to replace Commissioner Romeo Brawner Sr., who died last year.

Leonida, who was appointed last year and was inaugurated alongside Yusoph, has now taken Brawner's place and will serve until 2011. He was supposed to serve until 2015, replacing retired Commissioner Resurreccion Borra.

"There was a switching of terms. Borra's term went to Yusoph," Melo explained in a press briefing yesterday.

"Commissioner Leonida was trying to clarify this with the President. What happened? We don't know. It's Malacanang's prerogative," she pollster added.

Commissioner Nicodemo Ferrer said the two commissioners can sort out the confusion over their terms in the Commission on Appointments hearings.

Yusoph was not able to sit as a member of the Comelec en banc since he was first appointed because Congress had taken a break and he could not take his oath.

Both Yusoph and Leonida took their oaths of office at Comelec headquarters in Manila yesterday.

"I thank Her Excellency President Gloria Macapagal Arroyo for reappointing me as one of the commissioners of the Commission on Elections. I know she was convinced of my credentials. And for that, I am grateful," Yusoph said.

Addressing allegations he was involved in fraud in the controversial 2004 elections, Yusoph said he did not serve as a poll official at the time. According to Yusoph, he had exhibited bias... I know that being a public servant is a trust from God and that I am not only accountable to God but also to the Filipino people," he said.

"I assure the Filipino people I will not tarnish the name of this commission. I am an independent person and I will never allow my office to be an instrument to commit and perpetuate any acts of graft and corruption," he said.

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Church backs Earth Hour

THE CATHOLIC Church has given its support to Earth Hour, a global campaign to turn off the lights for one hour on the night of March 28 to underscore the fight against global warming.

Manila Archbishop Emeritus Cardinal Rosales called on the Catholic faithful to observe Earth Hour by turning off the lights from 8:30 p.m. to 9:30 p.m. that day.

He said every the Stations would be observing Earth Hour.

Rosales made the call over Church-run Radio Veritas.

Speaking in Filipino, the cardinal said Earth Hour was "not only a reminder but a major undertaking to protect" the environment "which has been neglected and abused in the past."

"My countrymen, on March 28 let us all join efforts in saving electricity and preserving the environment. Let us try not to use electricity for one hour," Rosales said.

He lamented how natural resources had been abused, how the rivers and lakes were being "treated like garbage dumpsters."

"Our only home is this planet," he said.

On Dec. 8, the Catholic Bishops' Conference of the Philippines (CBCP) issued a pastoral letter titled, "Upholding the Sanctity of Life," calling on the clergy and administration to immediately halt mining operations due to the "unconscionable plunder" of the country's natural resources.

The CBCP also called for a stop to illegal logging.

Inset, Rosales

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'Finally, conspiracy of silence is broken'

By Christine Avendaño and Dan's C. Dumlao

HEARINGS LOOKING INTO THE TRUE-blind pension industry were able to establish yesterday that Commissioner Jesse Mariñas of the Securities and Exchange Commission (SEC) played a role in determining the fate of pensioned companies.

SEC Chair Fe Barin said that Mariñas, as head of the oversight committee of the nonclassified securities department, was the one who supervised SEC Director Jose Aquino, who in turn oversees the pension industry.

Barin asked Aquino who was his immediate superior and the one who would have supervision and control over his decisions.

"It is my decision," Aquino told Barin.

Commissioner Mariñas was give recommendations," he said. But Barin asked Aquino "not to backbite me" as he repeated his question.

Aquino said he relies on unit recommendations Mariñas before these went to the commissioners en banc.

Barin probably asked Aquino whether his decisions in the case of Legacy passed through Mariñas and the latter replied in the affirmative.

To all this, Barin said: "Finally, the conspiracy of silence is broken, is pierced."

Mariñas said the memoranda from Aquino's office would pass his office en banc he could be aware that these would be presented to the commission en banc.

"I don't approve or disapprove the memoranda," the SEC commissioner said.

After hearing this, Barin said she would conduct an investigation of Mariñas when seven-year term of the SEC will end on March 16.

To reporters later, Mariñas said he did not participate in any of transactions or act as a "patron" of the Legacy companies.

"You're only one vote out of five (commissioners), so how can you protect anybody from a commission decision?" he said.

Barin said it was the first time that the SEC heard of the accusations against Mariñas.

She said Mariñas should be given the chance to be heard so that the SEC could have conduct its own investigation.

Philip Piccio, president of Parents Enabling Parents (PEP) Coalition, an advocacy group which brought in the two Legacy officials to Senate as witnesses, said he would like to see average regulators either resign or go to jail.

"The SEC should indeed conduct its own investigation. That's the least they can do," Piccio said.

"But it's not just the SEC which should investigate because it will be the same body investigating one of its own. The Ombudsman should also start investigating now," he said.

Ironically, Mariñas was as co-officer and senior member of the Citizens' Battle Against Corruption and was at the forefront of several anticorruption initiatives which resulted in some big tobacco measures pending passage by Congress.

Mariñas, a corporate lawyer, was appointed to the SEC in 2000. During the last SEC en banc meeting, he already bid goodbye to his fellow commissioners as his term was expiring this month.

Cash, house for SEC commissioner

Front page 1

NAPHAMA. Puerto Santo, chief finance officer of management Legacy Consolidated Plans Inc. (LCPI), shows documents to Senators Rodolfo Biazon, Mar Roxas and Juan Ponce Enrile revealing that the firm's owner, Celso de los Angeles, had full power and control over LCPI, especially with respect to its finances. JAY ISON

IN THE KNOW

JESUS ENRIQUE MARTINEZ was appointed to a seven-year term as commissioner of the Securities and Exchange Commission on March 16, 2001. He heads the SEC unit that monitors the pension industry.

Martinez has a law degree from Ateneo University, where he taught constitutional, political, commercial and remedial law. He is also an international securities member of the American Bar Association.

Before joining the SEC, Martinez had served as provincial board member, city vice mayor, special counsel to the chair of the Philippine Coconut Authority, and special assistant to the secretary of the Department of Finance and Local Government.

He is currently an officer of the party-list group Citizens' Battle against Corruption or Cibac.

In 2005, the Office of the Ombudsman Secretary suspended Martinez for a year for failing to settle his debts in a timely manner, which he had incurred before joining government. According to reports, the suspension was not served.

In May 2008, at the height of the battle for control of Manila Electric Co. (Meralco) between the Lopez group and the Government Service Insurance System, Martinez signed an SEC order favoring a GSIS motion to cancel and declare as void all proxies gathered by the Lopez group for the election of Meralco's board of directors.

Martinez was then officer-in-charge of the SEC as chair Fe Barin was in France for a conference.

The motion would have allowed GSIS to exercise control of the company's biggest power distributor from the Lopezes. However, the Lopez group cited irregularities in the documents like the absence of a docket number, date and official seal, and proceeded with the meeting. Cyrell L. Rosadiente, Inquirer Research

Luncheon meeting

Hilotin said she was able to confirm this when she met with Martinez at a Japanese restaurant in Shangri-La Makati on Feb. 11, 2008.

Because De los Angeles could not make it to the meeting, Hilotin said she, LCPI chief finance officer Nannamia Puerto-Santos and a lawyer met with Martinez to convey De los Angeles' apologies.

Hilotin said Martinez, who was accompanied by Zialcita at the luncheon meeting, asked how the project fund any problems that "he could help us with." She said him these was none.

Hilotin met Martinez again at the Linden Suites in Ortigas Center in Pasig City on Nov. 9, 2008, this time in hands over the P1.475 million.

"The money came from SB&E and other companies in response to the Mariñas for the Expedition acquired by B&E," she said.

"What I know is that while the Expedition was booked for the account of B&E, it was Mr. De los Angeles who personally used the same."

Martinez initially denied the allegations but eventually admitted that it was his son, Jesus Martinez II, who had dealings with De los Angeles.

The SEC commissioner said he could not recall meeting with Hilotin on Feb. 14, 2008, and that it was impossible for him to see her on Nov. 9, 2008, because that was the SEC anniversary.

Martinez denied receiving or selling a B&E Expedition but volunteered that it was probably his son's because the latter was involved in the buy-and-sell business.

Martinez also admitted that his son bought a house and lot in Pandacqui in Quezon province.

Credit card, text message

Hilotin stood by her statement that she had lunch with Martinez, saying that she used her credit card in paying the P52,000 bill for the Feb. 14, 2008, meeting with Martinez and Zialcita.

"In further proof that Martinez knew her, she texted a message to text message sent to her by the SEC commissioner on October last year in which she asked whether De los Angeles had changed his cell phone number because the Legacy Group founder was not acknowledging his text messages.

He cited Hilotin told Martinez over his decisions.

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Hilotin met Martinez again at the Linden Suites in Ortigas Center in Pasig City on Nov. 9, 2008, this time to hand over the P1.475 million.

"The money came from SB&E and other companies in response to the Martinez for the Expedition acquired by B&E," she said.

"What I know is that while the Expedition was booked for the account of B&E, it was Mr. De los Angeles who personally used the same."

Martinez initially denied the allegations but eventually admitted that it was his son, Jesus Martinez II, who had dealings with De los Angeles.

The SEC commissioner said he could not recall meeting with Hilotin on Feb. 14, 2008, and that it was impossible for him to see her on Nov. 9, 2008, because that was the SEC anniversary.

Martinez denied receiving or selling a B&E Expedition but volunteered that it was probably his son's because the latter was involved in the buy-and-sell business.

Martinez also admitted that his son bought a house and lot in Pandacqui in Quezon province.

Credit card, text message

Hilotin stood by her statement that she had lunch with Martinez, saying that she used her credit card in paying the P52,000 bill for the Feb. 14, 2008, meeting with Martinez and Zialcita.

"In further proof that Martinez knew her, she texted a message to text message sent to her by the SEC commissioner on October last year in which she asked whether De los Angeles had changed his cell phone number because the Legacy Group founder was not acknowledging his text messages.

He cited Hilotin told Martinez over his decisions.

"It is my decision," Aquino told Barin.

Commissioner Martinez was give recommendations," he said. But Barin asked Aquino "not to backbite me" as he repeated his question.

Aquino said he relies on unit recommendations Martinez before these went to the commissioners en banc.

Barin probably asked Aquino whether his decisions in the case of Legacy passed through Martinez and the latter replied in the affirmative.

To all this, Barin said: "Finally, the conspiracy of silence is broken, is pierced."

Martinez said the memoranda from Aquino's office would pass his office en banc he could be aware that these would be presented to the commission en banc.

"I don't approve or disapprove the memoranda," the SEC commissioner said.

After hearing this, Barin said she would conduct an investigation of Martinez when seven-year term of the SEC will end on March 16.

To reporters later, Martinez said he did not participate in any of transactions or act as a "patron" of the Legacy companies.

"You're only one vote out of five (commissioners), so how can you protect anybody from a commission decision?" he said.

Barin said it was the first time that the SEC heard of the accusations against Martinez.

She said Martinez should be given the chance to be heard so that the SEC could have conduct its own investigation.

Philip Piccio, president of Parents Enabling Parents (PEP) Coalition, an advocacy group which brought in the two Legacy officials to Senate as witnesses, said he would like to see average regulators either resign or go to jail.

"The SEC should indeed conduct its own investigation. That's the least they can do," Piccio said.

"But it's not just the SEC which should investigate because it will be the same body investigating one of its own. The Ombudsman should also start investigating now," he said.

Ironically, Martinez was as co-officer and senior member of the Citizens' Battle Against Corruption and was at the forefront of several anticorruption initiatives which resulted in some big tobacco measures pending passage by Congress.

Martinez, a corporate lawyer, was appointed to the SEC in 2000. During the last SEC en banc meeting, he already bid goodbye to his fellow commissioners as his term was expiring this month.

Zialcita: Legacy money was donation for projects

PARAÑAQUE REP. EDUARDO C. ZIALcita yesterday admitted getting money from Legacy Group founder Celso de los Angeles, but he said it was a donation for his public service programs in his district.

In a statement, Zialcita denied any involvement "in any capacity, official or unofficial, with the companies of the Legacy Group," saying that he has "never been a consultant to them."

One of the biggest banks in the Legacy Group, Rizal Bank of Parañaque, opened in Zialcita's district.

In her testimony in the Senate, Nannamia Beatriz Santos, chief finance officer of Legacy Consolidated Plans, said De los Angeles would give numerous checks to disburse money to Zialcita as consultancy fee.

"In some instances, Mr. De los Angeles directly instructs me to prepare vouchers and checks be and in the name of the good congressman," Santos said, reading an affidavit.

"This is evidenced by the numerous checks and vouchers in the amounts which a P100,000 per check totaling P1.8 million," Santos said.

House Speaker Prospero Nograles said there was no need to hold an ethics probe of Zialcita.

In a text message, Nograles said: "I have advised Congressman Zialcita to make himself personally available to ease the House committee wants to hear his side."

Asked if Zialcita must face the ethics committee, Nograles said: "Why ethics? Who is complainant, who is complaining against him?"

Zialcita denied the allegations against him. "I have never been the recipient, personally of checks or funds from the companies that make up the Legacy."

"The alleged use of my name on the records of the Legacy Group is appalling, and constitutes an insult of the highest order. It may be that my name was being used by this Group for its own purposes, as a foil against other high-profile personalities," he said.

Zialcita, however, acknowledged that Angeles and the Legacy Group had supported his public service programs in Parañaque, including free coffins, free burial services, feeding programs, free construction materials for fire victims and evicted squatters, and free medical (services) and seminars.

"I was never asked by Mr. Angeles and his group for any favors in return. Nor did I offer, or give any," Zialcita said. Gil Cabacungan Jr. and Dona-rine Arevalo-de

3 victims ask: Where's our money?

Front page 1

would be surprised to learn.

"The first investor to confront De los Angeles was Calleja, who put in P48,000 in the Legacy Scholarship Pension Plan.

"Do you have any hunch for the likes of us who are poor but who worked hard just to invest in this? The money we invested was our daughter's tuition fee because she has — but for us, it's already a big deal because we worked hard for it," said Calleja, who still has two children in college.

"When the pension fund was offered, I thought it would help me when the time comes that I won't be able to work. But I've been retired for four years. I don't have work because my arm isn't fed anything after years of working," she added.

Calleja said she was expecting that she would get help from Legacy starting next year but "all of a sudden" the pension fund closed.

Calleja added that she was also able to convince one of her children to invest in an educational plan for her grandchild but they have not been able to recover the money.

De los Angeles replied that there was a "grace period" available and Calleja only had to make a claim at the Securities and Exchange Commission (SEC).

"We have filed at the Comelec (Commission on Elections)," Calleja said in her confusion before correcting herself that she had indeed filed a claim in the SEC.

"But I don't know if we still have hope in recovering our money," Calleja said.

Inocencio said she put in P225,000 to Legacy's pension plan and another P150,000 at Banca Parañaque, a Legacy affiliate.

"I put it there believing that it was in safe hands, but I was wrong," Inocencio said.

She said one of her pension plans worth P100,000 matured in September last year, but Legacy officials told her that she had to wait 120 days before she could get her money. She was not able to get her funds because Legacy's Jacqueline Cruz, a Sanchez plan holder who confirmed De los Angeles was Villanueva who said she took out a P50,000 memorial plan five years ago, paying more than P1,000 a month.

"It's small but this would be a great help for us. We paid this little by little. I hope I could at least retrieve the basic [amount]. I no longer hope to get the interest," she said.

Sen. Mar Roxas, chair of the Senate trade and commerce committee leading the investigation of the troubled pension industry, said the plight of these plan holders and depositors was the reason he won't top pressing De los Angeles.

"Don't you pity these people, who don't even know a balance sheet, income statement," he said.

"[The should] show you Mr. De los Angeles the books of how you have stolen the money and how you used loans about the situation of those you have wronged because of this financial manipulation," Roxas said.

"You're here ABS Ateneo, Institute of Management graduate). You're a financial wizard. You used your knowledge, money and loans for your benefit? I will not let you off. The time, we will not let you off," he said.

WIDOWED seven-senior Jacinta "Nanay Binik" Calleja cries as the Senate hearing on Thursday when she asked Legacy Scholarship Pension Plan. JAY ISON

WALKING WOUNDED

In US, even those with jobs are losing pay

ST. LOUIS—IN CHICAGO, INC., interior and exterior floors dirty, assistant workers are trying to coax trash cubes to accommodate their overstuffing and to, "Well, at least we still have a job."

Not for many, that's becoming small comfort as more employers cut hours or hire only part-timers.

People paid on commission are suffering as sales plummet, and many store workers around the United States have been put on unpaid leaves.

Those workers are not counted in the unemployment rate, which hit 8.1 percent in February. They are not eligible for federal benefits that provide a safety net for the jobless. But their paychecks are vital and their reduced spending is a drag on the economy.

Call them the walking wounded—all of those recession-and-lifestyle of workers whose incomes have fallen even as they manage to hold on to their jobs. Their shrunken pay has forced many of them to make painful adjustments.

"I won't be able to buy the groceries I need to buy to make sure my family can eat until the end of the month," said Rhonda Shipp, a 32-year-old Caribbean state employee who just attended a 9-month course—not because of a state-imposed unpaid leave.

Before her pay cut, Shipp said her paycheck from California's Department of Motor Vehicles was barely enough for her to pay her bills. Now, she is facing foreclosure on her home and struggling to pay for utilities.

"I will have to ask Dexter to pay [her]," she said. "We're expected to work, even though we're not getting paid."

More than 600 million workers last year depended at least partly on variable pay which includes tips and commissions, according to figures from the US labor department.

The number of workers forced into part-time instead of full-time work soared 40 percent in the past year.

Especially hunkered

The average number of hours all employees work each week has also dropped. The commission blames severe of retail and auto sales have been especially hunkered.

Workers whose hours or commissions have dropped have still faced better than those who have lost jobs altogether. Even though workers are being given fewer hours to work, average hourly wages have continued to rise over the past year.

Still, many of those who keep their jobs tend to suffer during recessions right along with the unemployed, said Edward Lazear, professor of human resources management at Stanford University and former chair of President George Bush's Council of Economic Advisers.

As the recession cuts demand for goods and services, companies that don't lay off workers outright trust squeeze savings from the work force that remains. They typically do so by cutting hours.

Competition for jobs

And as a recession persists, rising competition for jobs results in slower wages and benefits. Companies have less any incentive to boost pay.

"Other guys are now competing with you for that job, and they're willing to take that same job for less money," Lazear said.

When companies cut or freeze wages for salaried or hourly employees, workers tend to feel the effect gradually.

For waitresses, car salespeo, retail clerks and others whose variable pay hinges on economic cycles, a pay drop tends to be as steep and fast, said Sylvia Allegretto, an economist at University of California, Berkeley.

That's because sales-based compensation is more sensitive to swings in consumer spending.

"They're going to be hard hit, because tips, commissions, incentives and all those things, along with bonus, are going to be cut," Allegretto said.

Pain quick and deep

For many, the pain has been quick and deep.

Until last year, 38-year-old Michael Hintz made about $100,000 a year selling Hummer sport utility vehicles at a dealership in Concord, California.

With 20 years of experience, Hintz was accustomed to moving 15 to 20 vehicles a month. Then gas prices soared and buyers dried up. He hit his first slump.

Now Hintz works seven days a week, 12 hours a day, but is still eight cars a month. His income has shrunk by more than half.

Normally, he's paid solely through commissions. But when business suffers, his dealership pays a subsidy to make sure a salesperson's pay for a month is no less than $1,500.

Qualified for subsidy

Recently, Hintz has sold so few cars that for the first time he's qualified for the subsidy.

Rhein, who's divorced with adult children, can afford almost two-thirds of his mortgage payment. He's trying to renegotiate his loan. In the meantime, he's bank for rent his seniors of four and sell

ISSN 0116-2042 PHILIPPINE DAILY INQUIRER Vol. 29 No. 82

OPINION

Email: feedback@inquirer.com.ph Website: www.inquirer.net/opinion

For Circulation Data contact Inq. Circulation Department, Mezzanine Floor, Philippine Daily Inquirer Bldg., Manila City PO. Box 1155 Intramuros Manila, Philippines Tel. Nos. 896-6000 local 3100 to 3199 or 896-3310 to 20 Fax No. 897-8099 or e-mail circulation@inquirer.com.ph For subscription rates see BOX 896 or call 897-8099 / 896-6000 local 3100 to 3199 Subscription Rates Outside Philippines

EDITORIALS

Last newspaper boom

THE CELEBRATION OF THE 10TH ANNIVERSARY of the Asia News Network last week served as an occasion for a great review of the Asian media as we examine themselves and us discuss the challenges that lie ahead.

The ANN, an association of 20 newspapers in 17 countries, was founded in 1999 to reduce dependency on Western news agencies and to give the readers the Asian perspective.

Starting from seven newspapers with a readership of 7 million, it has increased to 20 member-newspapers with a readership of 38 million.

The ANN operates in what is the most vibrant and most dynamic region in the world. Asia and the Pacific accounts for nearly 56 percent of the world's population and for over one-third of the global economic product. Kishore Mahabbani, author of "The New Asian Hemisphere: The Irresistible Shift of Power to the East," says that Asia and Asians are "reclaiming the prominent role they played before the surge of Western industrial and imperial power over the last two centuries."

In Asia, the media exhibited stunning growth before the global economic meltdown occurred. The World Association of Newspapers last June said that three of the largest markets for newspapers are in Asia: China with 107 million-copies sold daily; India, 99 million copies; and Japan, 68 million copies. Last Feb. 19 Hannah Beech, in an article on time.com said, "Fueled by a growing literacy rate and press reforms in some parts of the continent, Asia is enjoying what may be the world's last great newspaper boom."

But in the wake of the global financial crisis, all this optimism is being tempered. In many Asian countries, newspaper circulation is declining and advertising revenue is down. The number-newspapers of ANN, like other newspapers in the world, will have to re-invent themselves and look for new business models that will help them survive in an unfavorable economic environment.

They will also have to revise their editorial models to better meet the needs of their readers. A study made by the John F. Kennedy School of Government at Harvard University in 2007 said that as rapid changes in technology make the Web more reader-friendly, more and more people are turning to the Internet in their search for daily news. Convergence now appears to be the name of the game.

A more liberal political environment in many Asian countries could also help greatly in increasing readership of newspapers and other media in the meantime and help them weather the storm of the current global financial crisis.

Reputation for excellence

WE FELICITATE AYALA CORP. THE COUNTRY'S oldest and most respected business house, as it celebrates its 175th anniversary this year. Ayala is a model of solid management, financial stability and pioneering innovation, has contributed a lot to the economic development of the nation in the past two centuries.

Established in 1834 as Casa Roxas, Ayala engaged in diverse businesses ranging from sugar to mining. It introduced the trasvia (streetcar system) to Manila in the late 1880s. In 1978 it established Insular Life Assurance Co., the first Filipino life insurance firm. It put up the first industrial life insurance company, Filipinas Life, in 1933, the bank of the Philippine Islands in 1960, and with Globe Mackay Cable & Radio Corp., Globe Telecommunications in 1974.

In its most audacious business venture into the development of the former Hacienda San Pedro de Makati into the country's premier commercial and residential district. In all the business ventures it has executed, Ayala has established a name for excellence. It has also blazed a path in corporate social responsibility, nurturing the Filipino culture and way of life, and funding and developing programs to support schools, charities, livelihood projects and cultural programs.

In a recent interview, Jaime Fernando Zobel de Ayala II, Ayala Corp. CEO, said it has set the overarching tone of leadership across the group. "The values that have continued across generations revolve around building and maintaining trust across a variety of stakeholder groups and aligning ourselves to progressive national development goals."

Ayala Corp. has truly shown that business is not just about money; it is also about promoting values that help in the social and economic development of the nation.

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Unique distinction

IN THE COUNTRY, SEALED DOCUMENTS often exist speculatively. Their also-aren't fervent exertions.

The "second envelope" rumored to President Joseph Estrada's impeachment. His "Unang Hirit" senators allies sealed the packet...and unwittingly triggered People Power I.

World Bank reports on rigged bids for road projects seethe set in his story. The contradictions provoked surprise. And legislators whistle-stunned Undelivered forms. "The Non-Gentleman" wouldn't testify on Kelibisch's diary visit.

Now, scenes an affidavit on a nine-year-old murder: the "salvaging" of politician Salvador "Bubby" Dacer and his driver Emmanuel Corbito. Twenty-two armed men, in elevens, flagged down Dacer and Corbito along Ortigas and Shaw Boulevard in November 2000. They were strangled to death, and their burnt remains turned up in barangay Sta. Lucia, Imdala, Cavite. (If Animal: pathologists identified Dacer and Corbito based on "metal dental plates and rings.")

The Presidential Anti-Organized Crime Task Force, headed by Senate President Joseph Estrada, said to hand of SPO2 TSP Director General Danilo Lacson oversaw the agency with his aides Michael Ray Aquino, Cesar Mancao, Glenn Dumlao and Allan A. 1986 class 1972 graduate). Lacson was to national power starting with the Marcos tenure chamber, the Military Intelligence Security Group, near the Yale University study. "Closer Than Brothers."

The star chart for Dacer and Corbito—until Hit Men). At a Florida hearing on his extradition to Manila, former Senior Supt. Cesar Mancao met Dacer's daughter, Cecilia. Mancao insisted her he had signed an affidavit which "identified those involved in the crime." (Cecilia Cazenilo, the Dacer family's lawyer, attended the hearing.)

The Mancao affidavit hasn't been released. But affiant Manila is like a siren. The jailed man holds five secrets. Does Mancao's former agent advertisement, that it is all right, or cause admissible as "hollers esteem" is tantalizes to the room.

Fifth, the idea that murder is a laughing matter, or direct of that a negotiable one. No suggestion, however subtle or sly, could be more expressively perishable at that time when mayhem is being committed with impunity.

The argument against the death penalty is that it is inhuman, and does not deter crimes. That doesn't mean crimes should not be dealt with severely, particularly the most heinous of them, which is the taking of human life. What is heinous and what is not heinous is not being the criminals and punishing them as harshly as their crimes demands. We hear the second and not another promises humanity are their crime. Not such criminals lose his or her outside them harshly, and you do not defend humanity as opposed to the human claims for justice. You cannot criminals but do not punish them humanely and you do not defend humanity.

PACCT superior knew what his cronies masterminded overtures?

Lacson-cancun all over the place saying he had nothing to do with Dacer's release. This is self-admission. The senator knows it wasn't small. So, he insists that a former public-race culprit by his set side Marcos to an administration ploy it seeks to peg him from Dacer's three corpses.

That's his tune, given this register's acquired serial grafting. "Murder is always a mistake," Orson Welles once wrote. "One should never do anything that one cannot talk about after dinner."

Carina Dacer, for one, wasn't impressed. "Where Sir," she scoffed at Lacson's claim that Marcos is being arm-twisted to implicate innocent people. Lacson talked to Marcos in September, Carina said. "He knows that the guy has a pending criminal case in the Philippines. Alam nila siya lang meron ang Marcos... (he is a senator, and he knows where Glenn Dumlao and Marcos is)...so [Lacson] did never considered help to find them. Isn't that obstruction of justice?"

My grandmother, for one, never bothered with legal definitions, like "obstruction of justice." Some are quite simple; y se abre quien sea," she would say. Tell me who we got down with, and I'll tell you who you are.

It would not have escaped her notice that Lacson's chance aides skipped town in avoid arrest. Michael Ray Aquino and Mancao are in US federal prisons. So other public officials enjoy that distinction, expect perhaps Joseph Estrada. His midnight cohorts Jinggoy, Ilocos Sur Governor Chavit Singson, Atty. Alan Paguia, Deputy Ombudsman Jesus Dureza, Jr. and Lucio Tan, didn't leave forwarding addresses.

Estrada, meanwhile, dashed to seize himself self-absolution. "I had nothing to do with Dacer."

Why, did anybody say he had? Has he pushed into the Mancao affidavit? Or is this a belated recognition of conscious responsibility?

"Conscience is the inner voice which warns us that someone may be looking," editor H. L. Mencken once wrote.

Bill Mancao's affidavit disappear between his Florida prison and a Philippine legal bureau? That would be a waste, or else Diadiwala team or a congressional hearing. Stranger things have happened.

What we know, so far, about Dacer-Corbito is found, not in Philippine investigative reports, but in US federal court records. And last year, Judge William Pauley in New York ordered Court Judge William Pauley in New Jersey that denied bail for Michael Ray Aquino. Some excerpts:

In October 2000, Mancao asked Aquino: "Any one in Army Special Operations or in Army, what is Our Special Operations?" Aquino answered, "Some person you, as ... Intercept. Do we just or Philippines. (That's Intercept. That's already OB with Philippines.)

Mancao, then asked Aquino, "Close so far in to Sons tutti, like 71 [referring to Lacson]?" Aquino answered, "This no done any bullets or Army. (They said they will take it up with him)."

On Nov. 24, 2000, between 11 a.m. and 12:00 a.m., the text message came from Aquino: "Bukidnon ni Delia. Feb 22...we give coordinate with 71 [referring to Chief Supt. Vicente Arnedo]. Hoong kong magdating bigat Bicol. They got Delia, conduct tactical interrogation and coordinate with 19. Be not bring men from Bicol's. "Dacer was from Bicol.

Will the truth finally emerge? The house by the hotel. El resistance: "And then I clothe my naked villainy/ With odd, old rush-cut of body with/ And curses a color where mine I play the devil."

(E-mail: isambocruzado@gmail.com)

What closure?

THERE'S THE RUB

Conrado de Quiros

(Conclusion)

SOMETHING IS NOT A REASON TO BE FILLED. It is a reason to be denied. Being deadly sick is not a reason to be freed. It is a reason to be free. To mental. Murderers are sick, having them to be freed intimately. They are deadly sick, have a doctor brought to them.

That even being "born again" is a reason to be unbound into the arms of society, it is a reason to be welcomed only in the ears of God. Pilate has a way of making scientific distance God, if often not to the Board, it is a reason to be free. To mental. Murderers are sick, having them to be freed intimately. They are deadly sick, have a doctor brought to them.

That even being "born again" is a reason to be welcomed

Compassion in the season of Lent

AS THE CHRISTIAN WORLD OBSERVES THE THIRD week of Lent, it's perhaps fitting that the release of the last 19 soldiers accused of involvement in the assassination of Ninoy Aquino 25 years ago is being discussed, for it involves the Lenten elements of death, redemptive suffering and true compassion. As President Macapagal-Arroyo herself said, the release last week, technically under Supreme Court decree otherwise is in the central point in the debate, that it wasn't just and right to delay the release any further. "If it was not proven that they were the assassins," Legarda-Leviste's argument, which was also Deputy Ombudsman Oscar Cruz's, the soldiers have suffered enough.

I agree. I have held the opinion for some time now that guilty or not, the soldiers were pawns in the dirty game of many and should have been released years ago.

* * *

There came last Sunday's Inquirer feature interview of Msgr. Robert Olaguer, which in me is the kind of many very revealing interviews we've had in years. It's a no-nonsense, straight-from-the-heart discourse from the chaplain of the New Bilibid Prison who, for the past 19 years since the soldiers' transfer there after they were granted amnesty, has been the spiritual adviser to acquire "jurisdiction" over their souls. Olaguer said he has tried to apply psychological methods and spiritual skills to get to the Truth behind the assassination. Apparently he has become the soldiers' confessor of innocence and their version that Rolando Galman pulled the trigger, and he condemns to hell's fury by media reference to them as "Ninoy's killers."

Olaguer counts two of Ninoy's children, Ate Shorey Aquino and actress Kris Aquino, to try to talk to the released soldiers in order to get to the truth for their own "internal healing" and clear their family's name "unconditionally" from the "collective guilt" imputation of the tribunes as a "dishonor" to the justice and political system, arguing that were Ninoy alive today, he would not be happy to see innocent people jailed and their families suffering so much.

Political Tidbits

Belinda Olivares-Cunanan

It's hard to argue against Olaguer's belief, for aside from being a man of the church who is not supposed to lie, he has nothing to gain by siding with the released soldiers in the face of soldiers' public opinion. What's difficult to understand, though, is why Senator refuses to even keep the door open for a talk with the soldiers, and his closest activists against any possible involvement of his uncle, Ed Aquino Corpuz, who was isolated in the phrase "mastermind" by one soldier, Sgt. Pablo Martinez.

* * *

A roaring success. This was the verdict of the audience on the concert organized last Feb. 28 at the Philippine Sports Complex held in the president, soprano Karla Patricia Gutierrez, to raise funds for the medical treatment of Nidya Cabahug. The famed tenor suffers from kidney collapse owing to heart and diabetes complications, and needs a kidney transplant. Nearly before have artists from the Philippine music world come together in such a grand way, offering their talents for free for a "fun paradijan," as Karla put it. For one, that concert augurs well for a revival of the old bayanihan spirit among our people and of true compassion for life in need.

For the audience the concert proved little, a positive from a cultural standpoint. But what it has one report about the musical stars were all there, singing their hearts out in various popular Italian hits like *Caruso*, *The Impossible Dream*, *Nessun Dorma*, *The Prayer*, *Time to Say Goodbye*, *Bella*, and that rousing couple, tenor-of the Steel Kid, Jay Alvarez and Robert Seña, as well as an array of operatic singers, such as Ryan Gonzales, Cristina Jose, Lisa Gauthier, Pennie Asuncion, Sherwin Sena, Alwin Cura, Jennifer Li, Elaine Lee and Rose Edralin. The last is herself a bedeviled survivor who was reportedly clinically dead for 12 hours three months ago, but that night her magnificent voice soared, probably because she understood only too well the pain of suffering.

* * *

I was touched by how people came together for Nidya. The use of Cardiac Friends Andrews as the NDC title, was offered for free by NDRC's top honchos, Alfonso Pedroguez, and different people donated food for the production staff and the cast's mercedes and dinners. Even Ryan Macapagal-Arroyo, who was then attending the Asean Summit in Thailand, earlier sent Nidya a prayer card for speedy recovery, and that night she asked her sister-in-law, Mariter Arroyo-Dimaampao, to represent her. She also texted the Cabahugs and invited the PCSO chief to help prayer. As the recent splendid concert sponsored by the Embassy of Israel, featuring its best saxophonist, Amir Gwir-Krauss, I ran into National Kidney and Transplant Institute executive director Enrique Ona, who told me that the NKTI was already conferring with Nidya on treatment. The calling rests it, by once, voiceless with gratitude.

* * *

Another fund-raising concert for a nearly cancer will be staged this Friday, March 13, at Whitespace at 2314 Chino Roces Ave. Extension, Makati City, at 8 p.m. It features the student pianist Sara Gillespie, a big jazz star from the Cavite Hotel's Boulevard Bar in New York City, and Filipino pop outfit Pinoy jazz players, such as Tom Tolentino at the sax, Roger Herrera on bass and Mar Elorza at the drums. The fund-raiser will be staged by the Young Musicians Development Organization (YMDO) of the founder of the Philippine Youth Symphonic Band, a group of underprivileged but talented youths being nurtured by YMDO for a bright future in music.

Although get interested in PYSB's music and is not trying to help raise funds for Pinoy musicians. As a singer, her repertoire falls squarely into the Frank Sinatra/Tony Bennett mold while his piano playing recalls Bill Evans and Oscar Peterson. For tickets call Marlene at 997-1914/0760.

The World Bank and you

Commentary

Leandro V. Coronel

OVER THE YEARS, THE WORLD BANK HAS HAD the unfortunate use of being accused, with justification, of not doing enough to stem abuse of the funds it chooses to play about most of the time rather than engage its critics.

Today the bank is again in the eye of a storm in this country again, it gets flogged left and right, and again, it chooses frankly to stay mum.

The latest controversy is over the bank's blacklisting of some Filipino contractors that it found soliciting among themselves to be able to predetermine who was awarded the road projects of the Department of Public Works and Highways. In the matter of confidentiality accompanying to the bank's charter, the agency cannot simply provide copies of its internal documents to anybody. This is at the heart of the current controversy.

Public Works Secretary Hermogenes Ebdane, also spat at the World Bank for refusing to provide its findings on the alleged contractors among contractors to bag contracts. Ironically, the bank, like what's shown in the movies, is becoming the villain, at least the object of suspicion of many.

May I, as some kind of internal critic, offer some thoughts on how the bank works.

I worked at the bank's offices in Washington, D.C., for 10 years with the position of spokesman at my last assignment.

As a matter, let me say first that I've been out of the bank since 1995 and have not had any official contact since then. But I think that what I knew then still applies now.

As the public is learning from the news and the issues hearings, the World Bank is an international organization founded to help developing countries realize their economic potentials and thereby improve the living standards of their people through loans and policy advice. The bank is the cooperative but it is certainly government instead of people.

Being one of its projects, the Philippines has a say in the bank's policies and operations. Major loans and programs are approved by a board of directors that includes an executive director that represents the Philippines.

Projects that the bank funds for include roads, irrigation systems, bridges, hospitals, schools, and others that are grossly termed economic development. Projects must be vital to a borrowing country's economy. The bank, therefore, doesn't lend for luxury projects or for buying consumer goods. It also doesn't lend for areas of "last resort" because other lenders would not finance the typical World Bank project which won't big money makers or their own but are needed in a developing economy. That's why the bank lends for infrastructure and social sectors like education and health.

The bank is very strict with the disbursement of loan money. The money doesn't go to the government. Rather, suppliers for what a project needs are issued letters of credit by the World Bank directly for reimbursement.

World Bank staff monitor the implementation of projects from start to finish. Unlike other lenders who ask for progress reports from the borrowers, the World Bank has people on the ground to supervise projects. This is how the bank learns if there is something fishy or improper in the use of the loan moving quite lateral's interest.

Where does the bank get its money? The bulk of its funds don't come from the loan interest income, nor countries pay. Borrowers get their loans "on sun" plus one percent added on. That a typical World Bank loan is 5 to 6 percent. Unfortunately lower than loans from commercial banks.

In that non-commercial lending rate, the bank's loan profits wouldn't be able to sustain its lending of over $20 billion a year. So it sells bonds in the international financial markets as investments to money markets of banks in operations.

So, is membership in the World Bank good or bad for a developing country? Is the World Bank too strict with its project conditions that impede the ability of borrowing governments to make quick decisions?

Is the use of the Carlos P. Garcia Avenue-Quezon Avenue flyover in Quezon City, which was built by the World Bank, a project that is not in the public interest?

I was touched by how people came together for Nidya. The use of the Cardiac Friends Andrews as the NDC title, was offered for free by NDRC's top honchos, Alfonso Pedroguez, and different people donated food for the production staff and the cast's mercedes and dinners. Even Ryan Macapagal-Arroyo, who was then attending the Asean Summit in Thailand, earlier sent Nidya a prayer card for speedy recovery, and that night she asked her sister-in-law, Mariter Arroyo-Dimaampao, to represent her. She also texted the Cabahugs and invited the PCSO chief to help prayer. As the recent splendid concert sponsored by the Embassy of Israel, featuring its best saxophonist, Amir Gwir-Krauss, I ran into National Kidney and Transplant Institute executive director Enrique Ona, who told me that the NKTI was already conferring with Nidya on treatment. The calling rests it, by once, voiceless with gratitude.

* * *

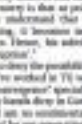
Another fund-raising concert for a nearly cancer will be staged this Friday, March 13, at Whitespace at 2314 Chino Roces Ave. Extension, Makati City, at 8 p.m. It features the student pianist Sara Gillespie, a big jazz star from the Cavite Hotel's Boulevard Bar in New York City, and Filipino pop outfit Pinoy jazz players, such as Tom Tolentino at the sax, Roger Herrera on bass and Mar Elorza at the drums. The fund-raiser will be staged by the Young Musicians Development Organization (YMDO) of the founder of the Philippine Youth Symphonic Band, a group of underprivileged but talented youths being nurtured by YMDO for a bright future in music.

Although get interested in PYSB's music and is not trying to help raise funds for Pinoy musicians. As a singer, her repertoire falls squarely into the Frank Sinatra/Tony Bennett mold while his piano playing recalls Bill Evans and Oscar Peterson. For tickets call Marlene at 997-1914/0760.

The 'stigma of print'

Newsstand

John Nery



IT IS A COMMONPLACE IN JOURNALISM studies. Today England labored under a so-called stigma of print, when publication using a printing press was thought to be, well, "today." Moreover, print remained the preferred mode of publication, to large part because they were, by nature, slow. Only the late "read" them.

That, at least, is how the theory works. The phrase comes to mind, however, the death notice of the Christian Science Monitor's print edition, which is now entirely digital age, will oblige attack anew to publication by printing press?

I can only agree, of course, when colleague Cass and de Quiros describe the background against which we must come to terms with the death of many newspapers. "Newspapers may go, but not so news and not so reading." The Internet for news, the human capacity for reading (a capacity largely untapped), and the invention of the printing press and Martin Luther's revolutionary appeal for the Christian faithful to read the Bible (in the vernacular) made newspapers both necessary and possible.

But the question we must ask ourselves, especially those of us in the Philippines caught in the right of ugly absurdity, is: What kind of news? What kind of reading?

I have a possible answer: Not enough of the stuff we really need as citizens in a democracy.

Paul Starr, in his indispensable critique of the state of media (In The New Republic, our last month), fashions a case out of the noise of 'O2 newspapers: "The economic abuse newspapers inflicted on themselves in the past few decades, the number of reporters, but deterioration in the quality of journalism, to the editorial ranks are thinned, internal checks on accuracy are being sacrificed." And: "Besides cutting back foreign, national, and state coverage, newspapers are also reducing their coverage of science, the arts, culture, and laying off science and medical reporters, music critics, and book reviewers."

Can the new online sites, running only a fraction of the overseas newspapers used to generate, subsidize the kind of coverage we have come to expect?

Ethan Zuckerman, who flagged Starr's report, sees it up nearly using a verb he has popularized: "What's missing, like the backdrop against a difficult journalism—deep investigative work focused on state capitals, on city finances and on international coverage. His worry is that as political and bureaucratic abdicated that the press is no longer watching, it becomes more tempting to do so. But, at least for the moment, his subtitle—Hello to a New Era of Corruption".

I will be the last person to deny the possibilities inherent in other media; I've worked in TV, radio online, taken part in "convergence" special reports (as well as gotten my hands dirty in Gawad Balagtas's original medium.) I am no sentimentalist for newspapers. But, at least for the moment, it seems to me they are worth saving. The democratic requirement may be at stake.

* * *

After reading reporter Boots Bonifacio's piece on Globalforce's latest monthly report for the Philippines, I've encouraged forward for a copy. I was much interested in the research firm's handicapping of the strongest presidential candidates, rather than its macro-read analysis of the Charter-change and must-ad late spitless open to the tongue-advertisement.

As I have said in my previous columns, Globalforce anchors its reading of the 2010 elections on survey results. No surprise, then, to see that we share essentially the same client list of winnable candidates. (The only exception is the firm's inclusion of deposed President Joseph Estrada, which, given his formidable legal obstacle that not even a comeback in a romantic special effects can handle.)

I must quibble, though, with the way the new top flight Filipino economists who wrote the report made use of a common assumption.

"For based on traditional performance, we are optimistic that any candidate of a unified opposition party will get an overwhelming majority. This is pretty much the rule of thumb of local political analysts."

Well, yes. Even Salonga would have likely lost in 1992 if not for the formation of the Laban ng Filipino and Alfredo Lim had combined forces. But what would happen to 2010 if the leading candidates failed to unite against an administration standard-bearer, or indeed (a scenario not too distant from Globalforce's own reading) if the latter's administration decided, as a matter of strategy, to field a "stalking horse" candidate? Who would be the "opposition" then?

My point: The rule of thumb—traditional—enforcers may not get much of a workout next year and even if it did, the idea of an "overwhelming majority" should be carefully scrutinized. We've had presidents elected by a plurality of votes—Ramos, Estrada, Arroyo—even a simple majority of the vote; under our first-past-the-post, no-runoff system, attaining a simple majority has become difficult indeed.

* * *

Relating blind, the Christian theater group of the Ateneo de Manila high school, is staging a special show of "Sisa," Gerlie Bagongbayan's masterpiece of "some adaptation," on March 27, for the benefit of the blind Ilaya School Foundation.

The following weekend, on March 27, Bert Gonzalez reprises his acclaimed role in "The Advocate" at Tanduay.

* * *

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Over the hump

BACK IN 2007, I WAS ONE OF THOUSANDS OF DISEMployed fresh graduates. I may not remember some best-man companies I applied to from June to October of that year, but I still never forget how I felt.

Having gone to one of the most expensive and also one of the best business schools in the country, I was expected to land a job soon after graduation. It did not happen that way. It took four grueling months of rejection and final interviews and false hopes before I started working.

It is not because my job was boring or hard to me. I had been offered an attractive position as a budget fund analyst in a multinational company in Makati in July that year. I signed the contract, but after 12 hours of reflection I withdrew my application.

Business process outsourcing companies also called, but out of pride, I refused their offers. I decided the stories about call center agents being scorned by their foreign customers. Accountancy and bank also made me an offer that my school-mates were willing to kill for, but because of the prestige and the high pay, but I also turned it down.

Ashley, I could not afford any form of paid luxury—not even a movie ticket. From 53 kilos, my weight dropped to 45. The situation was not just depressing, there was also shame and cultural contempt.

There were hundreds of 2007 a petroleum company invited me for an interview. I was hired two weeks later.

I got all the necessary clearances from the barangay police and NBI. The lines were long enough to make me aware of the life stories of other people around me. One guy was trying to get an NBI clearance so he could go abroad. Another was applying just to prove he could find a job someday.

I was pressed to tell my friends and the world that I had been hired by a local petroleum company although I was clueless what exactly the position of business development assistant entailed.

A year after I was hired, I was promoted to officer level. Business before that, I was already considering the thinking of resigning. I had dashed three resignation letters, but every time I would turn on the TV or read the papers I would be reminded about a looming recession and the increasing number of unemployed. I planned to resign, but I didn't know what I would do next. I did not want to waste the talents of the management.

It became clear to me that I was going through the "quarter life crisis" usually experienced by twenty-somethings like me. I had big dreams when I left the university, and when I came face to face with reality, I was disappointed. I had to go to work without a car. I wanted way less than what our college instructors told us we would be earning, and I was not even satisfied with the increase in the salary.

I was frustrated. Slowly I was becoming more and more an "ordinary" worker, doing for the profit of others. I was tired of the complaints, of the pressure, of not having weekends and holidays. I was burned out. I was close to losing brain dead.

I took a leave of absence to think about things, in earnest. At the end of my leave, I decided to resign and look for a work or to another unit. All the while I had completely forgotten my plan to take graduate studies and perhaps run on MBA.

I had said that I would not find a sponsor in order to paying for my tuition in the school where I wanted to enroll, although I find a great deal of excitement in looking for a school that would suit my needs.

At part of my effort to recover from burn-out, I enrolled in a gym as I would not keep complaining to my friends which they found stunning. I started looking for a business school to explore learning for a new employer. And I took vacations instead of taking unnecessary leaves of absence.

I have learned that resigning from my job is the latest way of escaping from the things we do not want in the company we work for, but no company is ever perfect. There will always be people who are annoying, uncontrollably busy or downright submissive to the workplace. However, these characters are the ones who also contribute to the identity of the company, and we are the ones who have to learn to live with.

"Sometimes we only stick with a company because of the people," someone told me once. That is absolutely true. No matter how much we hate other employees and the jobs we hold, we find it difficult to leave our colleagues who would become our friends and have our lunches and hangouts. They are the ones who make us laugh when we're feeling down and stressed. They are also the ones who push us to do what ever we want.

Two weeks from now I will be moving from sales to the human resource department. It is what I have always wanted secretly. I am excited about the tasks and everything else that will come with it. I am excited about getting into business school. I am excited about the career moves, as people call it.

Geralyn L. Cruz, 23, works for a local petroleum company based in Ortigas Center.

Young Blood

Geralyn L. Cruz

We seem to know what the young are thinking about. What are their thoughts on current issues? We invite contributions from the twenty-something set below. —Ed.

Notice to Youngblood contributors:

Send your contributions by e-mail to youngblood@inquirer.com.ph together with your address, age and the school, course and year you're enrolled in or, if employed, the position you're holding and the company you work with. Gen. e-ltr.com or Youngblood should not have been previously published.

They Said

Legislative primacy

"You are not invited there to get what you want, but to listen to your views. If your views would not be considered with value, legislators think should be the national policy, you have to affect to the legislature."

—Abra Rep. Luis Bersamin, after representatives of the Federation Philippine Conference of the Philippines called on House discussion on the RH Bill

Unforgivable statement

"When I told Erin I happened for several reasons and if there are present now, no one—President Macapagal-Arroyo or not—can say that there shouldn't be another people power."

—Rep. Imee Marcos-Manotoc, on the President's statement that the world will not forgive another people power

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San Mateo as dumping ground

WHY DO WE ALWAYS HAVE TO be the ones to suffer?

Being a resident of San Mateo for more than 25 years and having seen the town lose the grandeur of its environment through the years, I can't help but ask this question.

The unregulated "development" of San Mateo has allowed vested interests to turn this municipality into a wasteland. Quarry and land developers have leveled the town's mountains for their housing projects, destroying trees and burying headwaters and creeks and quasi-conquistors have inflicted great damage on our once beautiful landscapes, embedding tons of silt and mud into waterways and on agricultural lands; and rich individuals have carved up lands as they please.

It is no wonder San Mateo has become a town of disasters—experiencing flash floods, landslides and mudslides every time heavy rains, typhoons or other natural calamities visit the country.

Adding insult to injury, the people of San Mateo are again being forced to accept the "leftovers" of Metro Manila and now by trauma.

In an en banc decision, issued each Tuesday in December 2008, the Supreme Court ordered the permanent closure of the landfill operated by the Metro Manila Development Authority, which is located in Barangay Pintong Bukawe, San Mateo. The reasons: the significance of the human damage to the environment, it being part of the Marikina Watershed Reservation. The Court also highlighted a provision of the Ecological Solid Waste Management Act prohibiting the establishment of landfills inside an environmentally critical area. The case against the MMDA was filed by the local government of San Mateo, the provincial government of Rizal and 19 NGOs.

Three years later, the municipal government of San Mateo and the provincial government of Rizal are singing a different tune and are now pushing for a new landfill that will be built inside the entire barangay. The new landfill will again be the dumping ground for tons of mixed solid waste from Metro Manila and nearby towns. The barter created by the operations of the old landfill is set to make a comeback.

The new landfill will bring back the problems of the old landfill—the foul smell, the toxic leachate contaminating our land, water and air, among other problems and risks.

Different operators, same operator, same problems; same terrible disaster risks for the San Mateo populace.

It is the right of everyone to live in a healthy and safe environment. We, the people of San Mateo, absolutely do right.

—NOLI ARANAS

Behind Face Task Force Bonanza
Evelliste Coalition,
Doña Regina Subdivision,
San Isidro,
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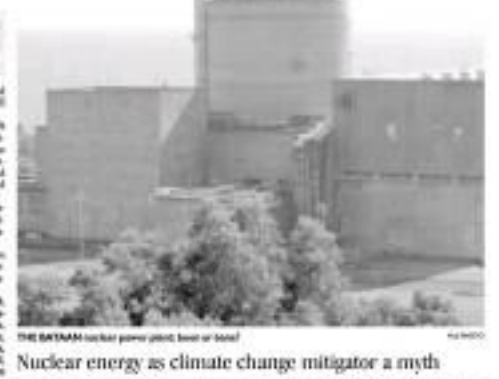
LETTERS



THE BATAAN nuclear power plant: boon or bane?

Calipjo Go's non-constructive mistake

THIS IS NOT A REJOINDER TO sensationalized sentiments regarding news filled textbooks. This is neither in defense of the author and publishing company nor an attempt to exonerate the Instructional Materials Council International (IMCI) of the importunist of toleration. This is just an ordinary citizen's point of view.

I really don't know Antonio Calipjo Go's real motives in sensationalizing issues in textbooks. I suppose he has every right to express or say he also puts his credibility under a cloud of doubt.

For instance, in his list there are sentences that are actually figures of speech:

• The issue now is what it is.

The movement of things is presumified, described in figures of speech. What's wrong with that? Most of the "issues" he mentioned are presented in a single item, not in the context of how they are used in relation to other sentences in a paragraph or, perhaps, in a poem. But there are many kinds of errors—concept and language errors, material errors of the author and editors, the typographical errors of the encoders and proofreaders, the layout artists' errors, and the illustrators' errors.

Let's give credit for the benefit of the doubt. It's possible that "hey" textbook copies have not undergone IMCI evaluation. This sometimes happens because there are agents of publishing companies who, in their eagerness to make their textbooks sell sometimes, connive with the printing staff to get advance copies of the textbooks that are still for editing so they have something to show as samples to schools. These could be the copies of the textbooks that landed in Go's hands.

Go is also not an academic superstar but had his renewed stake of participation in the sector he belongs to? In relation to the Implicit and IMCI, Go should have initially called attention to the errors through a formal letter, instead of immediately subjecting them to public embarrassment and thus destroying as well the characters of the author and publisher. Go's silence has thus fueling and fire of protests' claims for censorship.Being now aware about error-filled textbooks have undermined the credibility of the whole education. Go is not trying to solve the problem, but is being destructive instead of being constructive. He isn't offering any suggestions to remedy the problem.

Isn't it not forget that education is a continuing process. The positive is constantly under fire, from Ethnic to 41 upgrading. May the remaining few who are strong in character wake up and do something to uphold fair reading. Ignorance, gullibility, pride and prejudice. Let's push for moral reformation through good examples. Lapses in work are redeemable, but lapses in character will drag us all to the bottom of the pit.

—FEDERICO I. REYNO,
editor@inquirer.com.ph
Al Dalahay Enterprises Inc.,
Marikina Heights, Marikina City

JPE just speaks his own mind

FELIX PAZ, CHAIR OF THE BILL-saang Magkakaisang ng Pilipinas Bilad, was unfair to Senate President Juan Ponce Enrile (JPE) when he labeled the senator as the "compliant political butterfly." (Inquirer, 2/24/09)

It is true that Enrile has been a controversial figure in Philippine politics, but that it became he is no independent-minded man, with his own principles, who dances to his own tune. Pax Roque that Enrile, at the risk of his life, was one of the first Edsa revolution that led to the ouster of dictator Ferdinand Marcos and the restoration of democracy.

He served for the Senate three times and to the House of Representatives once. Enrile has played an important role based on his own principles. He is not merely puppet of Malacañang. He is being branded as one instead of being constructive. He isn't offering any suggestions to remedy the problem.

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—FEDERICO I. REYNO,
editor@inquirer.com.ph
Al Dalahay Enterprises Inc.,
Marikina Heights, Marikina City

Nuclear energy as climate change mitigator a myth

THE 11 IN RESPONSE TO THE front-page article titled "Nuclear energy key to climate change strategy" (Inquirer, 2/12/09), which is about the nuclear industry's claim that nuclear power has a role in climate change mitigation.

Nuclear power in fact undermines climate prevention and can only make a negligible contribution to carbon dioxide (CO2) reduction.

The nuclear industry would like us to believe that nuclear power offers a much better option for generating electricity because it does not release significant amounts of greenhouse gases or toxic pollutants. However, nuclear power plants are not much of an improvement over conventional coal-burning power plants despite claims that nuclear is the "clean air energy."

Uranium mining, milling, fuelling, plant construction and decommissioning are all energy-intensive activities which produce substantial amounts of greenhouse gases. Taking into account the carbon equivalent emissions associated with the entire nuclear life cycle, nuclear plants contribute significantly to climate change and will contribute even more as sunlight-rich high-grade uranium ores depleted.

Even assuming that the nuclear industry is the largest carbon-free energy source, as proponents claim, even if the industry quadruples its generating capacity, this would only reduce CO2 emissions from the energy sector by a mere 6 percent by 2050. Yet to achieve that, 1,300 large reactors would have to be built. That means one reactor every two weeks, starting from today to 2050, with investments costs reaching up to $13.5 trillion.

Add that to the intermountable problem of radioactive nuclear waste whose toxicity lasts for 10,000 human generations, and nuclear energy is clearly not the right choice and should definitely not be part of any climate change strategy.

—HAN BICHSEL
campaign manager-Philippines,
Greenpeace Southeast Asia,
Hoan Barangaroi
greenpeace.org

Bedridden widow missing pension for 9 months now

IN BEHALF OF MY SISTER, Leonora L. Bituanjon, of Barangay Tayuan, San Jose, Batangas—a widow, 82 years old, bedridden for four years because of a stroke, and mentally and physically incapacitated at present—I would like to call the attention of the Philippine Veterans Affairs Office regarding her "widowed pension benefit" from July 2008 to January 2009.

The last check she received was for the month of June 2008. It was also in that month that we received a letter from PVAO informing us that pensioners aged 80 years old and above should apply for guardianship with PVAO's Legal and Investigation Division. The letter was signed by Ms Honorelmina Villanueva, director III.

We religiously complied with all the requirements and submitted them on July 3, 2008. Unbelievably three months have passed and until now we have received no check. When we followed up my mother's check, the requirements we submitted were still in the box where they were placed on July 3, 2008. We had to help one of the Philippine Veterans Affairs Office employees locate the documents. We could not do anything except to give an ear to their promises.

We made another follow-up in October 2008 and we were told that my mother's medical certificate was not approved by PVAO's doctor. So we again made a request for another medical certificate from a government hospital here in our locality. Last November, we made again another follow-up and we were told that our application for guardianship was not yet approved. I was about to give up when, on Dec. 16, 2008, approval came and I was told that my mother's checks could only be entered into my account by January 2009 because of the long Christmas vacation.

Last 9th, 27, I checked my account with Landbank, Lipa City branch, and I was shocked to see that only P5,000 was added to my daily balance despite the long months of waiting. I don't even know for what month the P5,000 is.

Also, last Sept. 22, I received a letter from PVAO informing me that my mother's check for "Old Age Arrears" amounting to P60,877.42 from Dec. 26, 1991 to March 2001 was already sent to us. But until now, we have received no check.

—OLIVIA R. CALINGASAN,
Barangay Tayuan,
San Jose, Batangas

Accenture still recruiting in RP

ALLOW US TO CORRECT THE news story circulating in the local and international media, that Accenture will lay off half of its workforce in the Philippines.

Almost two months ago, on Jan. 15, 2009, Accenture announced a realignment program that affected approximately 300 employees, or 3 percent of its total workforce of approximately 15,000 people in Manila and Cebu. The redundancy program affected the Delivery Center, which is the Philippine operation of the Philippines. Accenture continues to recruit in the Philippines for other essential skills to meet client demand. The decision was made after a thorough review of its business in the Philippines, from which Accenture saw the need to balance the skills of its workforce with the demand of its clients.

The Accenture Delivery Centers in the Philippines are an integral part of Accenture's Global Delivery Network. Accenture has been in the Philippines for over 20 years now and remains firmly committed to its business here.

—ROMULDO SEVILLE,
spokesperson, Accenture,
Mandaluyong City

A pygmy among her women too

THIS IS A REACTION TO THE photo showing President Macapagal-Arroyo as "The Daily Woman" among the heads of state of the Asean nations. Do I have any sense of national pride in that photo? Is this short woman the "Iron Lady" We are all terribly progressing toward gender sensitivity and we are mostly happy for—and truly encourage the achievements of—high-flying women in politics, but this is not it.

Normally, I would feel enormously proud to put Gloria in the same pantheon of admirable leaders such as Margaret Thatcher of the United Kingdom, Golda Meir of Israel, Indira Gandhi of India and more recently Hillary Clinton of the United States.

On the contrary, I am deeply mortified to be represented by GMA in gatherings of world leaders, remotely only in our Asean backyard.

The abysmal quality of life I know where to start on this subject, but I don't know where to end! she has subjected her countrymen to under her administration—from corruption to the cost of living.

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—ELEANOR PUPPLE,
purel_puppl@yahoo.co.uk

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Change is us—now

COMMENTARY

Asuncion David Maravilla

TWENTY THREE YEARS AFTER EDSA 1, we're back where we started with big names and little gains. The cruel realities except for creating a stunned reader, all blame will fall without "inner change."

As let's begin the change—now, the change of internal attitudes, orientations, dispositions. As Jesus reminded: "Satan's influence before" (Inquirer, 3/25/99), ingrained in our culture. Let's focus on those with negative bearings on nation-building (as not everything can be covered); lay off the blaming and point to ourselves.

Here are some examples for change:

• We must be patriotic at last. Not were politicos, but we're not politicians. There's a great difference. Some election time from weight but bend associations in the presidency we become passionately political. Whispers, phone calls and text blasts, rhetoric, intrigue, feel of dominance this or that candidate. But after the election we retire as usual until something hits us in the pocket or "to the groin." Like the phoenix we rise and such into ashes.

On the other hand politicalism is an abiding concern, passion or disposition of being directly responsible for the state and future of the nation. It keeps an eye on the conduct of its leaders, is concerned with (like its welfare) corruption, justice related issues involving power; ignorance, etc; and when vigilance is not enough as in recent times, political action is necessary as an ethic others and drip away at the system until it yields to reform and revolution.

Partisan politics is essential and personal; politicalism is universal and for the common good. Partisan politics is flavor of the month and year and is subject to swing, turns and long haul. It never resigns to a purely civil status (as a "way of life"). Civic-minding all is the sense of nation and love of country "I, am, a, Filipino."

• We must uproot the remains of feudalism and colonialism that are established patterns of thought and behavior. Spain and the institutional Church were steeped in feudalism when they landed on our shores and the taindom of conquistador and dons required its implementation in our colony. That can contained in the dogmas of the '60s is still very much with us.

At least four colonial offspring must be reckoned: the "principalia" (unelitist), patronage and personalistic politics, relative relationships with superiors and inferiors, paternalism of leanings.

This four-headed snakes in America to gain ally as long as the latter are in positions of power. In fact blame Ghibi for sending Obama our key substance for shooting her. We are accomplished lovers in them coming under words like "rule" and "equity"; grateful to the patron till kingdom come. This is how we relate to inferiors, and to inferiors? We expect the same attitude, as for classical relationship with peers in a democracy, we still have to learn to manage as egalitarian, respectful persons.

Most of all we allow our "loyalty" great wealth and great misdeeds as our end justifications; never mind how they get the money. Political dynasties with corona "educating" or creating regions, and persons, not issues, will continue to top the polls. Add colonial mentality from American rule and we have ready made subjects to exploit.

• We also have to transfer to our religious life the values underlying democracy mentioned. Four qualities must be changed; an object reflecting split level Christianity, a fixation on the beginning and end of life, an unpublic church-catholic laity.

"Jesus everything and nothing in-between" issues are mentioned. A friend's pet called for "humility, mortification and self-deprecation." Prayers, hymns, homilies constantly remind us of worthlessness and sinfulness affirming and reaffirming a penitential mode to fear of mortal sin instead of social sins ravaging our land.

Since Spanish times (as part of subjugation, historians say) docility and obedience, no questions asked, have been implanted to our religiosity. Despite pastoral priesthood, formation of the christalism of Basil's era are still in place. But servility is not humility. "Learned-in-falsehood" is the greatest tragedy of Filipino religiosity.

Such a people will not do for nation-building. "Genuine religiosity empowers. It doesn't make the slaves." Nation-building is not a school, boy/girl, self-reliant people deploying all God-given talents and not forbidding them.

We fight tooth and nail over the beginning and end of life (their importance is not the point here) with eyes cast upon heaven, neglecting the long, complex middle of life on the ground (which by the way will determine heaven or hell), a mass of the status practicing a disconnect between what is believed and what is done.

Ironically, the political mandate has been repeatedly and solemnly rewritten the holy Trinity (this be for most of us (except perhaps the passionate ECs) not inclined or encouraged in be "savior" beyond repair). Church work gives to extreme devotionalism, a chain of churches, good works, token livelihood and education programs (and fund raising too!).

In January and February 2008, the Catholic bishops conference called for Circles of Discernment, & last Easter for priests, bishops, the Laity Council and despite Jesus' Godfather to Communal action (and here to the 1st Edsa), however, the desired grassroots level was dread in the routes—no structure, no follow through, no support.

Who will help me change?

Asuncion David Maravilla is a retired professor, book editor and economist. Comments to mardy_phil@yahoo.com; fax 8294414.

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BANK OF THE PHILIPPINE ISLANDS

Celebrating 175 years of Ayala

Across the NATION
Assistant Editor Tony Bergonia

41,000 jobs in Visayas, Luzon

AT LEAST 41,000 JOBS IN EASTERN VISAYAS and Luzon will be available to workers laid off due to the global financial crisis, government executives announced.

A government program, called the Comprehensive Livelihood and Emergency Employment Program (CLEEP), will provide over 30,000 jobs to trainees in Visayas, according to Presidential Assistant for Eastern Visayas Dyesebel Herrera.

Public Works Director for Central Luzon Alfredo Tolentino said 17 firms that won 220 government infrastructure projects worth P5.8 billion in the region are hiring 5,000 workers to help ease the impact of the financial crisis on the labor sector.

In Silangan Jilladeno Dordonal, Modern Orient Marmaluja, Bombilon and Bilimanca, at least 6,000 workers have been given jobs through the CLEEP since it was launched late last year to the region, according to Vice President Noli de Castro.

The CLEEP provides the creation of jobs through government projects and entrepreneurial training.

Manila and 12 government departments and agencies had been enlisted to provide job placements.

The Department of Public Works and Highways first implemented the CLEEP in Eastern Visayas by building a jobs fair in Tacloban City last month.

At least 1,000 persons were hired for infrastructure projects during the fair.

The jobs available under CLEEP include membership in the Barrio Super Loan Association and Barangay Cabut Development Council

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Globe

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'POC must consult members' on anti-PSC acts

By Jane Meneses

AVENTAJADO

AMID MOVE BY THE PHILIPPINE Olympic Committee in the wake of its conflict with the Philippine Sports Commission, officials have the blessing of the POC general assembly.

This was pointed out by former POC chair Robert Aventajado yesterday as he called on ranking officials of the Olympic body to present their complaints against the PSC before the entire POC membership.

"It's a very big decision to make. This is a good vote man and it should be settled by the general assembly," said Aventajado, who criticized the petition signed by 14 POC officials as well as by International Olympic Committee member in the Philippines Frank Rhodds, asking President Mercedes Teo to seek ouster PSC chair Harry Angping.

Aventajado, the taekwondo president, said the 14 signatories don't necessarily represent the feeling of the entire POC on the matter. There are 39 national sports associations considered as regular voting members while at least 10 more NSAs are categorized as associate members.

"You know sometimes members like minus the sport has been pissed in the SEA Games, so they must have a voice, too," said Aventajado, also the former chair of the POC's talent identification program Philippine Olympic Festival.

On allegations of government interference in sports, Aventajado said the PSC has always been involved in some of the affairs of the Olympic body.

"Even before, the PSC was included in the selection of athletes," said Aventajado.

"Didn't we always have a joint task force between the POC and the PSC during the selection of athletes for the SEA Games and Asian Games?"

Aside from providing funds for the training and preparations of national athletes, Aventajado pointed out that the PSC also provides office space for the POC at the Philsports Complex in Pasig City.

"If you plan to entirely break away from the PSC, you should pack all your belongings and leave for good," said Aventajado.

Ildefonso, Pingris back in action for SMB soon

By Cedelf F Tupas

ALREADY OFF TO A FINE START, SAN Miguel's campaign in the Fiesta Conference is expected to get another boost with the expected return of key locals from sick bay soon.

The injury list becomes, who share the early lead with Purefoods at 2-0, will have two more MVP Danny Ildefonso back in the middle of April, while Marc Pingris is close to recovering from a severe ankle sprain on his left foot.

Coach Siot Tanquingcen said he is hoping Danny Seigle, Mike Cortez and Lordy Tugado will also be able to resume to action to help the Beermen in the season-ending tournament.

Seigle has been ruled out for the rest of the conference because of a back injury, while Cortez is in the United States undergoing rehabilitation following an ACL injury. Tugado is out for at least a couple of months after undergoing arthroscopic surgery.

The MVP in 2000 and 2005, meanwhile, Ildefonso also had arthroscopic surgery on his left ankle, and knee spurs were removed from his right foot late last year.

Tanquingcen is satisfied with the Beermen's performance so far, but cautioned his players against getting carried away by their big start.

"It's not how you start, but how you finish," Tanquingcen said of his team that went on a conference-leading 7-2 start to the All-Filipino Cup before getting caught in a slump that dropped them out of the wild-card phase.

Stepping up for San Miguel in the first two games was Arnie Villanueva, who averaged 11.5 points.

Playing without an import after Stan Carter was not cleared by his team in France, San Miguel drew a career-high 27 points from Villanueva in a 93-89 win over the Aces.

The 25-year-old Beermen, Bahamas-born graduate, picked ninth overall in the 2007 draft, was named as the PBA Accel Otis Free-Coca Player of the Week for his exploits.

"He has always had the tools," Tanquingcen said of Villanueva, who played 16 games as the Beermen led by debuting import Gabriel Freeman's 46-point, 15-rebound effort, topped the Titans, 114-103, Sunday.

Pacquiao ring savvy decisive

Roach plays down Hatton power

By Ray Lauzo

HATTON

RICKY HATTON INSISTS HE'S A LOT stronger than Manny Pacquiao.

The British superstar also boasts he is the biggest fighter the Filipino ring icon will ever face when they tangle on May 2 at the MGM Grand in Las Vegas.

Both claims are disputable, according to Freddie Roach, a three-time winner of the year-wielding Pacquiao's corner, but he does not co make a big fuss about it.

Instead, the 49-year-old Roach, already enshrined in boxing's Hall of Fame, said there's another reason why Pacquiao will prevail and make Hatton's international boxing Oryginalcoin's light welterweight title.

The much-awaited megabout, according to Roach, won't be decided by power but by ring savvy.

"Strength doesn't win this fight, smart does," Roach said in a recent interview by The Sun. "My guy's the smarter guy."

Roach also scoffed at insinuations that Floyd Mayweather Jr. will be able to transform Hatton into a redoubted fighter on Fight night.

"Once he feels Manny's punches, he will revert to what he does best—and that's fight," said Roach, adding the monster Hatton becomes a brawler, a will spell his downfall.

Though Roach does not see the fight going the distance, he predicts it is going to end in the later stages owing to the toughness of the protagonists.

Meanwhile, Cuneo Pound of Intermittent, said Hatton has all the tools to topple Pacquiao, in his March 6 report, Ward contended that the Briton's lanky physique, the tactical know-how of Mayweather Jr., and Hatton's boxing wisdom will power him past Pacquiao.

HAPPY Pacquiao bears the pain as a gym assistant flags his side while a trainer during training at the 'Wild Card' gym in Hollywood. AFP

SPORTSWATCH

Filipino ref to officiate in Fiba U-19 cagefest

A FILIPINO WILL BE AMONG THE OFFICIALS OF THE NBA-UNDER-19 World Championships to meet on July 31 to 13 in Auckland, New Zealand.

Fiba sports director Lakmen Kotisha announced the selection of Bonifilo Bernales as one of four Asians in the 25-member pool of international referees for the prestigious tournament.

Samahang Basketbol ng Pilipinas executive director Rod Tuby said Bernales comes from a pool of nine international referees trained by the SBP National Referees Corps.

Bolden countries will see action in the Fiba U-19 World Championships, including the United States and Australia, Iran and Azerbaijan will represent Asia after topping the Fiba Asia Championships for junior men hosted in Tehran, Iran last year. —Jane Meneses

NCA derby draws top cockfighters

SOME OF THE COUNTRY'S FINEST FEATHERED FOR FOES OF THE season will be fielded anew in the National Cockers Alliance (NCA) derby today at the Fiesta Center in Pasig City.

Proceeds of the derby, hosted by sportsman and former Rizal governor Ito Ynares and sponsored by Sagupaan Complexes, will go to the college scholarship of three students at the University of the Philippines-Los Baños.

The derby draws the top guns of cockfighting, among them Manolo Lopez, Fiegfie Ilao, Nestor Mercado and Litor Orillosa, Philip Chongkiian, Tony Tan, Tony Mantor, Boy Torres, Ricky Valencia, Manny Co, George Bolarda, Gov. Espino and Raymond Velayo. They will be challenged by NCA members led by chair Rudy Alberto.

Puerto Princesa off-road challenge Friday

PUERTO PRINCESA CITY PLANS HOST TO THE BALANOKOTEK-nal Off-road Challenge on March 13 to 15 at the City Hall grounds.

Mayor Edward S. Hagedorn said the 3-in-1 event features 4x4 off-road vehicle racing, motocross time trials and mountain bike races all to be mounted as part of the city's 127th Foundation Day Anniversary and 5th Babaying Festival.

The babaying (boars) which resemble the Japanese ancestry (swine), is endemic to Puerto Princesa.

The Babaying Festival Offroad Challenge, organized by MP Tours for the third time, is open to more than 200 4x4 vehicles and 30 drivers from different parts of the country.

Some of country's best mountain bikers are vying in the races.

R&A turfgrass seminar at Alabang slated

THE NATIONAL GOLF ASSOCIATION OF THE PHILIPPINES, IN association with the R&A (Royal and Ancient) will conduct a one-day seminar on Sustainable Turfgrass Management at the Alabang Country Club on Friday.

The R&A is holding a series of such seminars in Southeast Asia to optimize the playing quality of golf courses in harmony with the soil and environment under economically and socially responsible management.

Thailand hosted the R&A last week.

The NGAP said the seminar fee is pegged at P5,000 for the general public and P2,000 for attendees coming from NGAP member-clubs. For inquiries, call (02) 801-4994.

Music maestro, one knockout, please

BARE EYE

Recah Trinidad

THE FIRST THING TO DETERMINE ABOUT Ventus SL Vera Cruz in 47m's makeup of that shiny and glam.

Ain't he, for example, a heroic ghost visiting from the time of Marcelo del Pilar and Apolinario Mabini?

He's him, tall, stern.

He's strong as really.

But there's something in his quite dignity, his carefulness, that made the status aspects his host had cupped out a history book.

* * *

"Guess how old I am," he said, looking at the skater who's been interviewing eyes.

Sing the host was told:

"You mean my 'fro," he mused finally.

Three eyes nothing in his cockfighting that suggested he wanted to be judged as being younger than his years.

But there's something to what he does best that has visibly kept him young and sires.

My Vera Cruz is a music collector.

* * *

There's nothing unusual there, no.

But before you start suspecting, let's not pour this of a nostalgia freak.

He's one of a kind, if somewhat one of this world.

He puts the lust to the classic pomadelessness of Leopoldo Salcedo, the great profile to whom Ateng Merino has a semblance.

When he retired from a big Makati bank after only 13 years ago, Mr. Vera Cruz widened his interest to carings, persons and stories.

He then sank everything he had in a very strange venture.

He put up a musical gallery and museum.

The establishment, Metronyan, at 97 Maginhawa Street, UP Village, Quezon City, is more of a boutique than a store.

But, just like its owners, it breathes with old-world elegance and Gilbertly.

The man, in longish khaki knee-pants and at his t-shirt worn by our forefathers under their barongs, was holding court, offering origins of homeless items.

He also dines and sleeps among his sacred treats and statues of our great heroes, from Marcelo to Mabini to Ninoy Aquino.

Mentor Vera Cruz, possessing a flowingly lovely hi- his self-lamenyarighe frame, could well be a virtuoso before a piano.

A request for a Bitty de la Cruz also brought back Ateng de la Cuesta, the original quasi of the headbones.

Before Tagalog, as could be expected, had no discouragement.

* * *

Name it and Mr. Vera Cruz has it in one of those old shelves.

What usually strikes you is the dedication and willingness.

This heroic music hodge owner could run stand the idea of all our luminal musical successes getting buried, dismembered and snuggercased under the web and dust of the cruel years.

"You know what?" exclaimed Dr. Idavi Magnaye, a youthful oncologist at St. Luke's. "My dad had to stay a total of seven home-sig ging here the first time he paid a visit."

Her sister Ineret murmured:

"Because part of the reason Mang Nonoy does spend for the naming of a young audacious who came back from Japan bringing news orthodontic-processed enhancement.

The reason this is eighteen, Robert Tagalog brings out the theme quality and evolution can a kind of the pampering Mang Nonoy gives to Angie, at least) normally carried in other old song sessions.

* * *

Mr. Leo Cesareo Perlas, alias Dan Cornelius, an executive director for Hanoi, sang the Indochinoise from whom Mona Mazda had copied everything, deep fondness in syrupy caressing.

Of course, the greatest surprise of the visit was Mr. Vera Cruz's confirmation that he has got a Barbie Princess, the golden-tressed flaming-longhaired spellbinder-advertisement modelturned after movie choreographer in the late 1980s.

That, for sure, was a real knockout.

The record is too old to be forgotten, except:

"You'll be discussing to be a National Artist!" humanity considered Ghost Magnaye, who knows an art treasure when he sees one.

Well, if Dr. Ann Ritzel or Flash Ebarle had, say, wrestled a song or two, you also for Nature Vera Cruz will have it up in one of those daisy-shelves.

UST bags 11th straight overall crown

By Cedelf F Tupas

IT'S A BALANCING ACT THAT University of Santo Tomas has mastered in the last 11 years.

Haunting their might in various fronts, the Growling Tigers captured their 11th straight overall championship in the UAAP season-ending drive at the end of the 2008-09 athletic season on Sunday.

In a league where the general championship is often an afterthought because of basketball's popularity, UST piled a tote of 20 points to amass 310 points and handily rule its 11th title overall.

La Salle settled for second with 241 points, while host University of the Philippines came in third with 235. Far Eastern U ranked fourth overall with 233.

Ateneo, which captured its first basketball crown in 10 years in September last year, finished fifth with 190 points, followed by University of the East (179), Adamson (99) and Nazareth U (15).

Compensating for their fifth-place finish in basketball, the Growling Tigers took the tournament 13 points each from their victories in men's fencing, women's football, men's swimming, men's table tennis, men and women's taekwondo, women's tennis, men's volleyball and men's beach volleyball.

UST also finished second in men's badminton, men's chess, women's judo, softball, women's table tennis, men's crossa, men's and women's track and field.

It finished third in women's badminton, women's basketball, women's chess, men's judo, swimming, women's volleyball and women's beach volley.

The Green Archers, swept by 6-rat throws in the basketball finals, topped women's chess, men's crossa and women's volleyball but had to be dismissed this season.

Celebrating its centennial year, UP prevailed in men's football and men's judo.

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Jazz survive Raptors, win 11th straight

TORONTO—DERON WILLIAMS HAD 25 POINTS AND NINE ASSISTS TO lead the Utah Jazz past the Toronto Raptors, 109-101, on Sunday for their 11th straight win.

Mehmet Okur had 18 points and 11 rebounds, Kyle Korver matched a season-high with 20 points, Paul Millsap had 16 points and 11 rebounds, and Andrei Kirilenko scored 15 for the Jazz, who have won eight straight games against Toronto.

Utah matched its largest winning streak since an 11-game run from April 5-16, 1999.

Chris Bosh had 30 points and 10 rebounds for the Raptors, while Andrea Bargnani scoring 20 and Jose Calderon adding 18 points and 11 assists. Andrea Bargnani scored 16 points, but Toronto still has to fifth straight.

At Boston, Dwight Howard scored 10 points with 21 rebounds, making a pair of free throws with 13.9 seconds to Orlando downed Boston, 86-79.

With the win, Orlando moved two games behind Boston and three behind first-place Cleveland in the East.

Rashard Lewis scored 23 and Rafer Alston had 18 points for Orlando, which won its fourth straight.

Ray Allen had 17 of his 22 points in the fourth quarter, sinking nine straight to make it 62-79 with 5:22 to play. But he hit the back of the rim on a three-point attempt from the left side that would have tied it with 46 seconds to play.

At San Antonio, Tony Parker notched his fourth 30-point performance in his last seven games as San Antonio sent Phoenix Suns reeling from its four-game road trip, 103-98.

Averaging 25.6 points since the All-Star break, Parker sealed San Antonio's third win this season over the slumping Suns with a one-handed runner with 38.2 seconds left.

Tim Duncan had 17 points and 15 rebounds against the Suns.

Going in the wrong direction is Phoenix, which fell four games behind Dallas for the final playoff spot in the West. Shaquille O'Neal was held to 14 points after averaging nearly 28 in his previous four games.

At East Rutherford, New Jersey, Devin Harris had 33 points and 16 assists as New Jersey ended a frustrating stretch of close losses with a win over New York, 106-101.

HOME RUNS: Boston 43, Gerlea 10, Toronto 89. Chen 74 Hoge 114. Angels 100.

PHOENIX Suns center Shaquille O'Neal (top) dunks over San Antonio Spurs forward Matt Bonner. O'Neal, who averages 28 points, was limited to 14. —AP

World of Sports

WBC: Aussies stun Mexicans

MEXICO CITY—AUSTRALIA STUNNED a stunning 17-7 victory over hosts Mexico in Pool B baseball Classic pool play on Sunday. Chris Snelling leading the visitors to a first triumph in the event with two of his team's four home runs.

Australia's next game is against Cuba on Tuesday after the highly rated Caribbean team eased to an 8-1 win over South Africa.

The hardened Australians outhit Mexico 20-12 with Snelling going 3-for-5 at the plate as Luke Hughes and Ben Risenger also added a home run apiece.

In Puerto Rico, Miguel Olivo homered twice and drove in five runs, and the Dominicans rebounded from a startling loss to their tournament opener by beating Panama 9-0 in an elimination game. Reuters

Breakthrough for Yang

PALM BEACH GARDENS, FLORIDA—YE Yang accomplished his first PGA Tour win Sunday, closing out a one-shot victory over John Rollins at the Honda Classic. The South Korean, best known for helping Wake Forest win the NCAA Championship in 2006, picked up a two-year exemption and $1,008,000.

Becks eyes 4th World Cup

LONDON—DAVID BECKHAM IS DETERMINED at AC Milan to pursue his goal of playing for England in the 2010 World Cup.

The 33-year-old midfielder announced Sunday that a deal had been clinched with the Los Angeles Galaxy to extend his loan contract at Milan until the end of the Serie A season before returning to the United States, his home for the last two years.

Speaking from Milan in an exclusive interview with The Guardian's chief football writer Sid Lowe, Beckham said he hopes to play in his fourth World Cup at next year's tournament in South Africa. AP

Chinese sweep All England

LONDON—CHINA CLAIMED ALL FIVE titles at the All England championships on Sunday, only the second time it has done the feat after Denmark in 1948.

"We have great team spirit and all the players wanted it to happen," said coach Li Yongbo after compatriot Lin Dan beat Malaysia's Lee Chong Wei 21-14, 21-14.

The mixed doubles duo of Nie Haisen and Yu Yang put the ball rolling early on, followed by victories for Olympic champion Lin Dan and unseeded Wang Yihan in the singles. Zhang Ning and Zhao Yunglan duly saluted in the women's doubles. Reuters

LET Andy Roddick hits a backhand. AP/AFP

Spain, US Cuppers power to final 8

LONDON—RAFAEL NADAL DEFEATED Nicolas Dkiderio in straight sets as defending champion Spain cruised into the Davis Cup quarterfinals on Sunday, while Hard Levy won in five sets to put Israel there for the first time since 1987.

They will join Croatia, Argentina, Russia, Germany, Czech Republic and United States in the next round.

Andy Roddick swept past Switzerland's Stanislas Wawrinka in straight sets, 6-4, 6-4, 6-2, as the US progressed with a 4-1 win over the Swiss.

And Spain and Germany will be the Croats on July 10-12.

A meeting of the top- and third-ranked players in the world turned out to be one-sided as Nadal, who conceded only three games in his other singles match on Saturday, won 6-4, 6-4, 6-1 victory in Barcelona.

"The surface favored me, the ball was jumping high. I felt comfortable and he committed more errors than usual," said Nadal, who has never lost in five are match on clay and has an 11-1 Davis Cup record.

David Ferrer then beat Victor Troicki, 6-0, 6-3, in the meaningless last reverse singles match to round off a 4-1 win that sets up a clash with Germany.

Nicolas Kiefer completed Germany's victory by beating Rafael Nadal, 7-6 (5), 6-4, 6-4, in Garmisch-Partenkirchen to make it 2-1.

Stefan Koubek beat Germany's Christopher Kas, 6-2, 6-3, for his side's consolation point.

With Israel and Sweden level at 2-2, Levy beat Andreas Vinciguerra, 6-4, 4-6, 6-4, 3-6, 9-6, to decide their World Group first-round series. AP

Joe

THIS MARCH 15 WILL RECALL THE BIRTHday of the late Jesuits' Joe Cuenco whose dying wish almost two decades ago was not to be forgotten.

That would be really hard to do with a man that large in the physical and figurative sense.

Where American news anchorman Walter Cronkite retired from the CBS Nightly News, his successor Dan Rather inexplicably said that he was only succeeding Cronkite and not replacing him.

We who followed Joe have also only succeeded him and still stand behind his very large shadow.

To this day, fans who saw him in boxing, cycling and later on in the PBA, still insist his booming voice and his wily use of the English language.

* * *

The shadow is not something we fret about. Instead we are proud to have worked with the man and to have been blessed by his mentoring and friendship.

Together with Pinggan Magsaysay, Joe was senior anchorman for the Vintage PBA coverage in the 1990s.

He nurtured and nurtured us with his impish humor that oldies brothers heap on younger siblings.

He affirmed Ed Picson, Bill Velasco, Butch Maniego, Chino Trinidad and me to use his unique phraseology and nourished us on teaching the camera.

* * *

Joe was very private with few people who know how to reach him by phone. But he could warm up easily among colleagues, like when the production team would go out on Thursday nights (the PBA had games on Thursdays then) to the restaurant to continue clubbing.

And he could easily woo but wooing Nancy Kintanar, Joseph Wilke and Andy Jao over something outrageously funny or inane.

As an older brother, he stepped in quickly to cap the inevitable differences that creative and passionate individuals have when they are teased into some situation.

When some of us three-young ones seemed to be getting going too and borrowing

ONE GAME AT A TIME

Sev Sarmenta

ardonia of the older team members, Joe led by example and refused to get involved in back-stabbing and name-calling.

He would talk with both sides and find a way to make us work together again as if there was no problem to begin with.

* * *

Joe also taught us to be generous with the interruptions, to allow our on-air colleagues to strut their stuff.

Vintage top-man Rolando Yetes liked that quality in Joe and saw it as perfect for the changes he wanted to make in the way basketball was covered.

As for Joaquin's natural charm, Andy's incisive analysis and Quintin Henson's abundant research and knowledge shine on television.

So many others who worked with Joe in boxing like Sarah Trinidad, Manny Pilod and Al Mendiola will agree that their forays into broadcasting were made a lot easier with Joe as anchorman.

* * *

Today, I often "hear" Joe in the big sports events we host.

I am sure he would be thrilled to cover Manny Pacquiao in Las Vegas and would see everything in his arsenal of phrases to cover the Pacman.

I speculate now, but he would probably have said in that rich baritone, "Manny Pacquiao has unleashed the inner lethal of left hooks, wreaking havoc not only on his opponent's face but on his pride as well. The devastation may be irreparable."

Very few can mix personality, talent and years to one smoking package.

That's why we still hear him today and see the lessons the incomparable Joe Cuenco taught us.

CAMALIBAN'S 6-PEAT - Caloocan mayor Oscar Malapitan (fifth from left, standing) receives the Championship trophy from PAL president James J. Bacalso (in striped shirt) as members and other team officials look on. The Sugar Barons scored an unprecedented fourth straight victory double in the mixed 52nd PAL Interclub golf tournament in Davao, winning both the Seniors and Men's Regular divisions. The players include Tomas Manotoc, Jose Mabie, Jesus Bautista, Paul Estanol, Wim Espino, Mark Fernando, Zaldivar Gidan, Boni Hernandez, Joaquin Lukop and Boy Lukop. Also in photo is lawyer Romulo Quimbo (fourth from left, standing). PAL Interclub tournament committee chair and PAL senior assistant VP for Mindanao.

FLIRTING UP WITH LG Bernie Bustamante, chief executive officer of the Formula One Group (left) and Director Soohee Sealon, LG Electronics chief marketing officer, are all smiles after signing an agreement granting the sharp tie LG's entry as F1 partner in the sport's global marketing arena.

Best Center hoops, volley classes up

THE BASKETBALL EFFICIENCY AND SCOuting Training (BEST) Center opens its basketball and volleyball classes on April 2 at the Stanford in Mahogany.

The Monday to Thursday sessions will last until April 30, before the second offering of the Mills-sponsored BEST Center is offered on May 4 to 30.

Introductory courses (Level 1) will be from 8:30 a.m. to 11:30 p.m. while classes in Levels 2 to 4 (3-2 years and above) will be from 3 p.m. to 6 p.m.

Introductory courses will be held from April 1 to 9, while second sessions will open from May 2 to 27. Volleyball classes are held every Wednesday and Saturday.

BEST Center, founded 31 years ago, will also hold sessions in Assumption College Makati City from April 1 to 26, offering introductory courses in Levels 1 and 2. Classes will be held every Wednesday and Thursday, from 5 p.m. to 6 p.m.

Play Academy in Quezon City will likewise have clinics for Level 1 students.

Interested parties may call 372-3065 to 66.

Liverpool awaits Torres return for game vs Real

LIVERPOOL, ENGLAND—Wilted Liverpool and Real Madrid cling to Selling hopes of winning their domestic titles, the two sides resume their fierce rivalry for the Champions League trophy when they face each other Tuesday for a place in the quarterfinals.

Liverpool scored a valuable away goal in a 1-0 first-leg victory and enjoyed a rare weekend off from competitive action to prepare for the decided game.

Manager Rafa Benitez is also hoping striker Fernando Torres will recover from the ankle injury he picked up two weeks ago in the Spanish capital. AP

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Ayala Foundation

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Aplus METRO
Editor Alexandra S. Lihaylay

DID YOU KNOW

ON MARCH 6, 1901, Republic Act 187 was signed into law, making Fort Santiago in Manila a "Shrine of Freedom" in memory of Jose Rizal and other martyrs who had been jailed or had died there.
CyVC Zosabella, Inquirer Research

Caloocan City gov't shuts down mall

Mayor assures vendors no one will be displaced

By Beverly T. Hatividad

THE CALOOCAN CITY GOVERNMENT YESTERday closed down the Ever Gotesco Grand Central Mall in Monumento after the court allowed it to take over the property due to the owner's failure to pay millions of pesos in real property taxes.

As the mall was shut down, shoppers were asked to leave the premises while store owners were at a loss on what to do after they were told to start packing up their wares to prepare them for vacating the establishment.

Caloocan Mayor Recto Echiverri, however, said in an interview that despite their takeover, some of the mall owners will be displaced.

"The city will now be handling the business," he explained.

He said that this time, unlike previous closures, the city government will now deal with the mall administration.

On March 6, Judge Oscar Bautista, acting presiding judge of the Caloocan City Regional Trial Court Branch 126, issued an order allowing the city government to take over the mall.

The decision was based on a petition filed by the city government on Jan. 16 seeking the issuance of a writ of possession to enforce its right over the property.

According to the city government, the mall owner, Gotesco Investments Inc. (GII), failed to pay P721 million worth of real property taxes from 1996 to 2008, prompting them to initiate foreclosure proceedings against GII in 2007.

The property was later put up for auction but when no bidder made an offer, the mall was forfeited in the city government's favor.

Sought for comment, the Ever Gotesco Malls management said they have yet to come up with a statement on the matter.

SHOPPERS leave the Ever Gotesco Grand Central Mall under the watchful eyes of security guards. ALVIN JUAREZ

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Heavy traffic on SLEX irks motorists, commuters

By Marlon Ramos

A 14-KILOMETER LONG BOTtleneck on the northbound lane of the South Luzon Expressway (SLEX) yesterday irked motorists and commuters who were caught in heavy traffic during the morning rush hour.

Irate drivers of public utility vehicles (PUV) lashed out at the Philippine National Construction Corp. (PNCC) and Citra Metro Manila Skyway Corp. (CMMSC) for failure to issue a traffic advisory.

"They could have at least announced that people should expect heavy traffic. We could have taken alternate routes," Felicisimo Aquino, a driver of a van accusing passengers from Cubao, Laguna, to Makati City, said in Filipino.

Michelle Andres, an insurance firm agent and resident of Sta. Rosa City, Laguna, complained that because of the "unexpected" traffic jam, she was forced to cause an important meeting with a client.

"The PNCC should be sensitive to commuter troubles like me who rely on our meager earnings to support our families. Because of the heavy traffic, I might lose P50,000 in potential commissions," she said.

Vehicles that suffered engine problems further worsened the traffic flow on the thoroughfare, a PNCC report said.

At around noon, the long line of vehicles had reached up to the Bilibid exit in Laguna from the Sirawan exit in Tagaig City.

SLEX Superintendent Glen Ogena-nova manager, said the bottleneck was caused by the closure of one of the highway's three traffic lanes because of road work near the off-ramp portion of the elevated Skyway in Sirawan.

The construction, he said, was part of the second phase of the P6-billion Skyway project which started on Sunday.

Superintendent said motorists and passengers using the highway should be more patient as the construction of the eight-kilometer elevated tollway from Sirawan to Alabang, Muntinlupa City would take at least two years to complete.

He denied allegations that they did not issue an advisory about the road work, saying they had put up billboards on the expressway reminding motorists to expect heavy traffic.

"Maybe the people were just surprised to experience the traffic jam yesterday. But they should understand that the completion of the Skyway would improve the flow of traffic on SLEX," Superintendent told the Inquirer.

To ease the traffic, Superintendent said they opened a lane on the southbound portion of SLEX to accommodate Metro Manila-bound vehicles.

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Fernando says he's hurt by CA decision describing MMDA as 'iron-hearted'

By Allison W. Lopez

METROPOLITAN MANILA DEVELOPMENT Authority Chair Bayani Fernando is fuming over a Court of Appeals decision that described the agency as having an "iron-hearted source" when it comes to its sidewalk clearing operations.

In reaction to the court's Feb. 27 ruling ordering the MMDA to pay P50,000 in damages to a resident whose sari-sari store was demolished by the agency in 2005, Fernando yesterday said it was unfair for the CA to use such a term.

"When the court makes a decision, does it mean 100% iron-hearted? Meaning involved dun [There are a lot of things involved there], it's not a personal decision. I wish the court would not say those things because it's damaging to our institution," he told the reporters.

"The court cannot accuse us of being arbitrary and high-handed. Dapat merong mali bago magkaganoon. Di rin naman, we did nothing wrong. We have to bring this up to the Supreme Court because we don't want our people to be unjustly blamed," Fernando said.

The appellate court's decision overturned a ruling by the Quezon City Regional Trial Court on Dec. 29, 2005, which said the MMDA had the right to demolish Gloria Bautista's structure because it was built on the sidewalk which, according to the lower court, was government property.

The appellate court, however, said Bautista's store, which was located on Edsa, Cubao, was built on private property.

The court stressed that the MMDA should have "exercised more caution and should have refrained from demolishing their semi-permanent" when Petad presented documents to show that the store was on private property.

Fernando, meanwhile, said that in Bautista's case, the MMDA may have found violations on easements.

"It's not as simple as having a permit because there are regulations. It was a judgment call made by my men when they removed the store," he added.

Fernando said that despite all this flak they have been getting and attempts to harm their men, the MMDA would remain relentless in dismantling all kinds of obstructions to help ease road traffic.

NBI, Isafp rescue trader from kidnappers

By Jeannette I. Andrade

A JOINT TEAM FROM THE National Bureau of Investigation and the Intelligence Service of the Armed Forces of the Philippines (Isafp) has rescued a Chinese businessman from the hands of two of his companions and a Filipino who allegedly kidnapped him and tried to capture him off for P30 million.

At a press briefing yesterday, NBI Director Nestor Mantaring said that operatives from the NBI National Capital Region and Isafp raided on Wednesday an abandoned duck farm in Barangay San Isidro, Magdalena, in Laguna and arrested Chinese nationals Huan Jian Zhi and Gong Peijiang, both residents of Binondo, Manila.

The group's alleged commander—Michael Yang, 44, a Filipino from Sta. Cruz, Manila—was arrested in a follow-up operation conducted at the San Francisco Hotel in Barangay San Francisco, also in Magdalena, Laguna.

Mantaring said the victim was still looking for five others now believed to be involved in the kidnapping of Henry Sy, a businessman from Tondo, Manila. They were identified as William Ong, Jimmy Go, Xiao Jian Tan, Orse Sy and a certain "Boong."

The NBI director observed that the cases of Chinese nationals being abducted by their compatriots were increasing and that the victims were planning to meet with leaders of the Chinese community to prevent similar incidents.

He added that Beijing was previously accused the condo officials of not doing enough to curb the kidnappings

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Percentage of Christians in US declining, says study

More Americans say they have no religion

NEW YORK—A WIDE-RANGING study on American religion life found that the percentage of Christians in the nation has declined and more people say they have no religion at all.

Fifteen percent of respondents said they had no religion, an increase from 14.2 percent in 2001 and 8.2 percent in 1990, according to the American Religious Identification Survey.

The study found that the numbers of Americans with no religion rose in every state.

"No other religious bloc has kept such a pace in every state," the study's authors said.

In the Southeast, self-identified Catholics made up 36 percent of adults late year, down from 43 percent in 1990. At the same time, however, Catholics grew to about one-third of the adult population in California and Texas, and one-quarter of Northerners, largely due to Latino immigration, according to the research.

Nationally, Catholics remain the largest religious group, with 57 million people saying they belong to the church. The tradition gained 11 million followers since 2000, but its share of the population fell by about a percentage point to 23 percent.

Christians who aren't Catholic also are a declining segment of the country.

In 2008, Christians comprised 76 percent of US adults, compared to about 77 percent in 2001 and about 86 percent in 1990. Researchers said the dwindling ranks of mainline Protestants, including Methodists, Lutherans and Episcopalians, largely explains the shift. Over the last seven years, mainline Protestants dropped from just over 17 percent to 13.8 percent of the population.

The report from The Program on Public Values at Trinity College in Hartford, Connecticut, surveyed 54,461 adults in English or Spanish from February through November of last year. It has a margin of error of plus or minus 0.5 percentage points.

The current survey, being released on Monday, found traditional organized religion playing less of a role in many lives. Thirty percent of married couples did not have a religious wedding ceremony and 27 percent of respondents said they did not want a religious funeral.

About 12 percent of Americans believe in a higher power but use the personal God or the core of monotheistic faiths. And, since 1990, a slightly greater share of respondents—1.2 percent—said they were part of new religious movements, including Scientology, Wicca and Santeria.

The study also found signs of a growing indifference of churches that say they don't belong to a denomination or play down their membership in a religious group.

Respondents who called themselves "non-denominational Christians" grew from 8.1 percent in 2001 to 8.8 percent last year. Congregations that were often not the term are megachurches considered "seeker sensitive." They use rock-style music and less structured prayer to attract people who don't usually attend church. Researchers also found a small increase in those who prefer being called evangelical or born again, rather than claim membership in a denomination.

Evangelical or born-again Americans make up 34 percent of all Americans, or adults and 41 percent of all Christians and Catholics, the study found. Researchers found that 15 percent of Catholics consider themselves born again or evangelical, and nearly 30 percent of mainline Protestants prefer those labels. AP

Pastor deflected bullet with Bible

MARYVILLE, ILLINOIS—A Pastor shot and killed during his Sunday sermon deflected the first of the gunman's four rounds with a Bible, sending a sudden white spray of paper into the air in a horrifying scene that parishioners initially thought was a skit, police said.

The gunman struck down the pastor of the sprawling First Baptist Church shortly after 9 a.m. and briefly spoke with his First Witness, then pulled out a .45-cal. semiautomatic pistol and began firing until it jammed, Illinois State Police Director Larry Trent said. Churchgoers wrestled the gunman to the ground as he waved a knife, slashing himself and two other people, Trent said.

None of the about 250 parishioners seemed to recognize the gunman and investigators do not know details of Pfeifer's conversation with him, but they planned to review an audio recording of the service, Trent said.

"We thought it was part of a drama skit ... where he shot, what you saw was control," said Linda Cunningham.

Authorities didn't know whether Pfeifer, a married father of two who had led the church for nearly 20 years, knew the gunman. AP

The WORLD

Editor Lorenzo B. Queaño

12,000 US troops out of Iraq by September

Bomber kills 30 in Baghdad

BAGHDAD—ABOUT 12,000 US SOLDIERS WILL leave Iraq by September, officials said on Sunday, hours after a Baghdad suicide bomber killed about 30 people in a chilling reminder of the nation's still shaky security.

The withdrawals, which will most likely come from Baghdad and Anbar province, once main battlefields of the war, are the first step in keeping with President Barack Obama's pledge to end America's role in the war.

That would bring US troop levels to more than 120,000—still a substantial force. As part of the drawdown, the US will turn over 74 facilities and areas under its control to the Iraqis by the end of March.

All 4,000 British soldiers remaining in Iraq are also scheduled to leave by September.

A US spokesperson, Maj. Gen. David Perkins, said Iraq's security has "greatly improved, moving from a very unstable to a stable position." He said violence was at its lowest level since the summer of 2003.

Sunday's attack was the worst in Baghdad in months, injuring about 60 people beyond the dozens killed. But to a news conference hours later, Perkins described it as a sign that US-led coalition forces have militants on the run.

"We know that al-Qaeda, although greatly reduced in capability and numbers, still is dangerous to maintain relevance here in Iraq," Perkins said.

The suicide bomber detonated his explosives as he drove his motorcycle into a group of people, many of them police recruits, waiting near a side entrance of Baghdad's main police academy in a mainly Shiite area of the city.

The heavily fortified academy has been hit by several bombings. A Dec. 7 suicide bombing there killed at least 35 and wounded dozens, including four US soldiers and an Iraqi general.

Iraqi and US forces sealed off the scene on Sunday, allowing only ambulances and fire engines to enter. Nervous Iraqi troops fired in the air to prevent onlookers and reporters from getting too close.

No group claimed responsibility for the blast, but suicide bombings are the signature attack of Sunni religious extremists, including al-Qaeda.

Extremists increasingly have targeted Iraqi forces as they take over the country's security as American troops can go home. Last week, President Obama announced the end of all combat missions in Iraq by the end of August 2010, leaving up to 50,000 US soldiers to train and assist Iraqi security forces. All US troops are to leave Iraq by the end of 2011. AP

25 must-haves for a real SUV

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- 5-speed Tiptronic Automatic Transmission
- Self-leveling suspension
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- Projector-type headlamps* with leveling device
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- 17-inch alloy wheels
- DVD and Bluetooth Compatible
- TCM (Transaxle Control Module)*
- Speed-sensing auto door locks
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WorldBriefs

N. Ireland attack shakes fragile peace accord

LONDON—After years of sharply reduced political violence in Northern Ireland, the gunning down of a group of British soldiers by Irish Republican dissidents threatens to shatter the Protestant and Catholic communities and a hallmark of the still-fragile calendar of the province's power-sharing government. Politicians from both communities joined on Sunday in condemning the attack on the British soldiers and two pizza delivery men outside a British army base in Antrim, 15 miles northwest of Belfast. The attack late Saturday killed two soldiers and seriously wounded two other soldiers and the delivery men, who somehow survived when the attackers unleashed an up volleys of automatic fire at the men as they lay on the road outside the base's main gate. It was the first deadly assault on the British military in Northern Ireland since an IRA sniper shot a soldier in 1997, a year before the Good Friday peace agreement, with the United States as a key broker, set out a roadmap for ending sectarian violence in the province of 1.8 million people. NYT

China strengthens frontier in Tibet to deter unrest

BEIJING—China has beefed up security forces guarding Tibet's mountain frontier with south Asia, a senior police official told state media, sensing the controls will help prevent unrest as the region enters a sensitive month. China shares a border in the Himalayan region with India, Nepal, Bhutan and Burma (Myanmar). For many years Tibetans have crossed back and forth, some with official approval and some in study in Buddhist monasteries run by exiled monks. The movements were another official warning against groups that may seek to use this month to show discontent with Chinese rule in Tibet. 50 years after the region's Buddhist leader, the Dalai Lama, fled across the mountain border into north India in what is now known as the Chinese rule. The anniversary of the Dalai Lama's flight falls on Tuesday. Reuters

Transit use in US hit five-decade high in 2008

MORE PEOPLE rode the nation's public buses, subways and commuter trains last year than in any year since 1956, when the federal government created the Interstate highway system, according to a report by a transit association. Americans took more than 10.7 billion unlinked trips on public transportation in 2008, a 4 percent increase over the previous year, according to the report by the American Public Transportation Association. Use of public transportation in the United States has risen 38 percent since 1995, the report said. Ridership surged after gasoline prices hit $4 a gallon in the summer and held steady in the fall after gas prices fell, the report found. NYT

North Korea holds vote but suspense is lacking

SEOUL, South Korea—North Korea elected its rubber-stamp parliament on Tuesday, in violation that outside observers monitored closely for signs of a shift in the isolated Communist government's power structure. With the election of delegates to the Supreme People's Assembly, South Korea said the groundwork for a new five-year term for its leader, Kim Jong-il. The new Assembly's first task when it convenes in the coming weeks will be to elected Kim as chair of the National Defense Commission, an event that analysts in the region say the North will most likely celebrate by test-launching its longest-range missile, the Taepodong-2. NYT

Sudan president threatens to expel more aid groups

EL FASHER, Sudan—Sudanese president threatened to kick out more aid groups and foreign diplomats and peacekeepers on Sunday during his first trip to Darfur after an international court issued an arrest warrant against him for war crimes there. Sudan has already expelled 13 of the largest aid groups operating in Darfur as part of its defiant response to the International Criminal Court's decision last week to indict him. Sudan has accused them of cooperating with the Netherlands-based ICC. AP

IN THIS ISSUE

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- SMC eyeing gov't stake in PNOC-EC /B6

Editor Raul G. Marcelo • Assistant Editor Corrie S. Mariano

BUSINESS

RP seen avoiding recession this year

HSBC execs remain upbeat on local economy

By Doris C. Dumlao

BRITISH BANKING GIANT HSBC SEES THE PHILIPPINES POSTing a modest economic growth of about 2 percent this year, thereby avoiding the recession suffered by western economies.

The foreign bank's top representatives in the Philippines are also upbeat on opportunities on both retail and wholesale banking business in the country, despite a lingering global financial turmoil.

Personal Finance Business in Eurasia expected to continue growing in the Philippines and the bank has brought to Ben Legaspi as new head of this segment. Legaspi headed the same business for HSBC in Vietnam and was CEO of HSBC's joint venture with Bank of Communications in China.

The new executive said HSBC's consumer lending would continue to grow, albeit at a single-digit pace or slower than the 15-percent rise seen in previous years. "But that's still positive. We don't see a recession. We'll still see a growth of more than 5 percent."

Legaspi noted that sentiments from overseas markets were continuing, the government's budget deficit is under control and foreign exchange reserves at an all time high. "We're not seeing a subsidies in infrastructure (spending) and there's a lot of operational demand."

By the second half of this year, Legaspi added that the country would benefit from fresh spending ahead of the presidential elections, which could be its own internal stimulus.

HSBC, active in local investment banking

AP SEEN B2

T-bill rates inch up; 91-day at 4.394%

By Bernadette W. Damicog

TENDERS FLOODED YESTERDAY'S AUCtion for treasury bills, but results were mixed as the Bangko Sentral ng Pilipinas (BSP) slashed key policy rates ahead of the expectations, while inflation eased up.

Rates for the bellwether 91-day bills rose 13 basis points to 4.394 percent from 4.294 percent.

The 182-day bills fretted 4.444 percent, also up 2.9 basis points from 4.625 percent.

On the other hand, rates for the 364-day debt instrument went down 1.3 basis points to 4.748 percent from 4.761 percent.

Yesterday's auction was "generally positive, the interest is very strong based on the tenders submitted, resulting in the oversubscription of the three issues," National Treasurer Roberto S. Tan said in an interview.

Investors tendered P2.4 billion for the benchmark issue, of which the Bureau of the Treasury accepted P1 billion as planned.

For the six-month issue, buyers tendered P3.61 billion and the Treasury accepted only P1.28 billion against the program of P2.3 billion.

For the one-year bills, investors tendered P6.8 billion and the Treasury awarded fully at P3.5 billion.

"The mixed results were due to the the somewhat disappointing decision of the BSP on the policy rates," Tan said.

He was referring to the BSP decision last week to slash its borrowing and lending rates by 25 basis points to 4.75 percent and 6.75 percent, respectively.

Analysts had expected the BSP to reduce the rates by more as much, mainly on the basis of projections that the inflation rate in February would go down from 7.1 percent in January.

TREASURY B2

Currencies

PESO-DOLLAR RATE

P 48.28 = $ 1

As of 9:45 a.m., 7/Mar/09, BSP

FEBRUARY MARCH

Stock Market

Meralco slumps 25% to P40/share

SHARE PRICES CLOSED 1.5 percent pierced lower yesterday, as investors dumped blue-chip stocks amid gloomy economic prospects, dealers said.

(See stock market report on Page B2)

The composite index lost 25.04 points at 1,866.62. The all-shares index fell 1.3 percent, or 23.08 points, to close at 1,210.78.

A total of 1.31 billion shares valued at P1.2 billion were traded. Decliners led advancers 40 to 22, while 54 issues closed unchanged.

Dealers said losses for the day were led by power retailer Manila Electric Co. (Meralco), which ended 25.4 percent down at P40.

Philippine Long Distance Telephone Co. shed 0.8 percent to P2,870 as profit-taking after last week's rise.

Traders said they expect the market to consolidate in the 1,850-1,900 point range today.

AFP

Zest-O expanding Asian operations, eyes Africa

By Doris C. Dumlao

LEADING BEVERAGE maker Zest-O Corp. of Filipino-Chinese businessman Alfredo Yao has mapped out an expansion program in selected Asian markets including mainland China, Indonesia and Vietnam, and is exploring fruit opportunities in west Africa.

Yao said representatives from his company were now in talks to acquire from a French company a new beverage plant in Beijing that he claims to own as a production platform for RC Cola. Aside from producing his own juice and other beverage brands, Yao holds a franchise to produce RC Cola, an American carbonated drink, from RoyalCrown Cola International.

"It will be finished probably by mid-[illegible]," he said. "[I will] mainly be for RC Cola but we'll also use it to produce juices."

Pushing RC Cola in China, Indonesia

It will not be the Zest-O group's first time to venture in China but Yao said his group had sold out of an earlier investment there.

Yao said he was also upbeat on opportunities in Southeast Asia, particularly Indonesia, where his group was now about to finish building a new manufacturing plant.

"Indonesia has a big potential, given its large population and low climate like ours," Yao said, noting that he would bring Zest-O's juice brands there.

He said the group now had an existing presence in Vietnam and would soon bring RC Cola in that market too.

Yao added that west Africa looked promising too, but did not specify which state he was keen on. Among the countries in this region are Ghana, Gambia, Nigeria, Togo, Mali, Liberia, Sierra Leone, Benin, Senegal, Guinea and Ivory Coast.

Meanwhile, he said that the group's new venture in Dubai who blew up and running following last year's acquisition of Arab Beverages Establishments (ABE), the world's biggest producer of fruit juice stands to slay patch pouch and tetra pak packaging used by Zest-O for its juice products.

ABE, which Yao's group bought for P680 million last year, has the capacity to produce at least 20,000 packets an hour.

Although bulk of his group's business is in beverage, the Zest-O group is also into confectionery, instant noodles and toothpaste.

PLDT trust fund buys 10% stake in Meralco

By Elizabeth Sanchez-Lucero and Doris C. Dumlao

THE GROUP OF MANUEL V. PANGILINAN now has a 10.1-percent stake in Manila Electric Co. and emerged as a formidable new ally for the Lopez family whose control of the country's largest power utility has come under threat with the entry of San Miguel Corp.

Pangilinan's group clinched a foothold in Meralco through the Beneficial Trust Fund, the benefit pension plan for employees of telecommunications giant Philippine Long Distance Telephone Co., which bought a total of 113.3 million shares of Meralco from Feb. 3 to Mar. 6 at between P62 and P72.23 a share.

The acquisition, which was disclosed by Meralco to the Philippine Stock Exchange yesterday, has savaged for the group one seat in 11-member board of Meralco. The shares were bought by BTF and New Gallant Ltd., a holding company incorporated under the laws of the British Virgin Islands (BVI) but whose outstanding shares are beneficially owned by the BTF.

Asked whether BTF and New Gallant will vote with the Lopezes, BTF vice chairman and ePLDT president Ray Espinosa said: "We are dialoguing with the Lopezes." He also could not say who would be nominated to the Meralco board to represent the new voting block.

Both BTF and New Gallant currently don't have plans to acquire more shares in Meralco. They also plan to nominate and elect a director to the forthcoming Meralco stockholders' meeting on May 26.

"PLDT does not own assets of the retirement fund. Neither does PLDT nor Fine Pacific Co. own New Gallant and BTF," Espinosa also stressed.

The new report on beneficial ownership did not include who sold the shares to the PLDT camp. Some of the shares were earlier reported to have been sold by Meralco's own retirement fund.

Pangilinan's entry is widely believed to be an insurance for the Lopezes to stay in control of Meralco now that SMC and its allies have accumulated voting rights equivalent to at least 34 percent of the company at almost at par with the Lopezes' holdings.

Total oil production at Galoc hits 1M barrels

By Amy R. Remo

THE GALOC OIL FIELD IS OFF. short, Rubicon has produced to five million barrels of the Palawan light crude as of early morning yesterday, according to one of its consortium members.

In a disclosure to the Philippine Stock Exchange, Philodrill Corp. said field operator Galoc Production Co. (GPC) has reported that it reached the "symbolic milestone" following the resumption of operations at the oil field last Feb. 25.

The consortium GPC is scheduled the next offloading and delivery of Palawan light crude by mid-March. According to the field operator, the fourth cargo from the oil field will be sold in an existing purchaser based in Asia.

Since it began production in October 2008, the oil field operator has already offloaded and delivered three cargoes of approximately 600,000 barrels of the Palawan light crude to the Petron oil refinery in Manila and buyers in Thailand and South Korea.

Philodrill holds a 7.00-percent stake in the Galoc oil field, owned by Service Contract 14C (Galoc sub-block). GPC holds the major shareholding interest at 58.29 percent.

GPC also disclosed that production rates at the oil field reached as much as 18,000 barrels a day during the first week when operation resumed.

"However, rates are expected to settle back to 12,000 to 14,000 barrels of oil a day over the coming weeks," GPC said.

The company further noted that the enhancements made to the production facility's metering arrangements last month have so far performed as expected.

Oil reserves at the Galoc oil field was earlier estimated at 19 million barrels. Reserves estimates and requirements for additional wells and facility capacity are being reassessed from initial field performance.

Other participants in the Galoc field's consortium include Nido (Service Philippines Pty Ltd. with a 22.28 percent participating interest; Oriental Petroleum and Minerals Corp. and Limpanar Oil Gas and Power Corp., with a joint 7.37-percent stake; Forum Energy Philippines Corp., 2.31 percent; Alsons Gold Resources Corp., 1.33 percent, and Philodrill Resources Corp., 1.01 percent.

Treasury bill . . .

From page B1

Yao said the actual inflation rate for last month, which "match[ed] the upper band of the forecast," was another reason for the reduced rates in yesterday's auction.

In a related development, Yao said the planned "no deal" roadshow for Power Sector Assets and Liabilities Management Corp. was postponed indefinitely due to adverse market conditions.

The Treasury chief was supposed to accompany Pinoy officials on a promotional tour that would cover financial centers in the United States, United Kingdom and Asia, originally slated this week.

"Investors are preoccupied with the negative developments last week such as AIG (American International Group) asking for additional bailout funds," Yao said.

RP seen avoiding . . .

From page B1

spare from its personal finance services, expects a heavy pipeline of bond-funding activities within the next three months, the bank's country manager Mark Wadsworth said in a press briefing yesterday.

"Definitely, the offshore market is more challenging now," he said, noting that bond issues would thus likely tap the domestic market.

As to whether there would likely be a crowding out among local borrowers, Wadsworth said: "You've got to get your timing right. If you go in the market, you've got to be conscious who else is issuing at the same time you are. If you issue at the wrong time, at the wrong price, nobody's going to take your bond."

HSBC, along with the state-owned Development Bank of the Philippines, is the lead issue manager of San Miguel Brewery's maiden peso-denominated bond offering worth up to P20.8 billion, the biggest in local bond history.

He said the issuance, which generated warm appetite among investors, would likely be completed by the first week of April.

"There's no doubt that San Miguel transaction will be the benchmark for local bond transactions," Wadsworth said.

HSBC is offering three-, five- and 10-year bonds but Wadsworth said the five-year bonds would likely get the biggest demand given the tax advantages. Local securities with tenor of five years or more are tax-exempt in the Philippines.

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February vehicle sales up 2.7%

By Abigail L. Ho

AMID A STARK BACKDROP OF recession, local vehicle manufacturers still managed to register a 2.7-percent increase in sales in February as 9,027 units rose from January's 8,791 units.

In a joint statement, the Chamber of Automotive Manufacturers of the Philippines Inc. and the Truck Manufacturers Association said this sparked optimism among industry players as February sales would be indicative of better things to come in the new months.

"Although year-to-date local sales registered a slight 2.5-percent decline for January-February 2009 versus the same period in 2008, local auto players are hopeful that the increase in local February sales is a positive sign indicative of a growth trend for 2009," the statement said.

Industry group optimistic of posting 2-4% growth this year

For the first two months of the year, vehicle sales fell 2.5 percent to 17,818 units from 18,282 units in the same period last year.

But industry players were still optimistic that the projected growth of 2-4 percent this year could be achieved. Except and TMA forecast vehicle sales for the year to reach 130,000 units.

Corapi president Elizabeth Lee said steady sales could be expected in the coming months.

"We are indeed thankful and continue to be cautiously optimistic, especially when two-thirds of the world semi-conversion but year and auto sales elsewhere are plunging," she said. "We continue to bank on sustained investors Filipino workers' remittances, the entrepreneurial trend, and the retired mobile financing market to help boost sales."

As with previous quarters, commercial vehicles, including Asian utility vehicles and light commercial vehicles, dominated sales, registering a 63-percent market share for February.

Sales for the first two months of the year, however, went down 7.6 percent to 11,272 units from 12,196 units in the same period last year. But February sales were up 0.3 percent.

The commercial vehicle segment was buoyed mainly by AUV sales as most of these vehicles were snapped up for use in businesses.

Passenger car sales, on the other hand, registered a 7.6-percent growth to sales to the January-February period to 6,546 units from 6,086 units in 2007.

But February alone, sales reached 3,162 units, down 6.6 percent from the 3,384 units sold in January.

Toyota Motor Philippines Corp. continued to hold the top spot among local vehicle manufacturers with sales hitting 6,268 units in the first two months, 1 percent higher than last year's 6,205 units.

Mitsubishi Motors Philippines Corp. claimed second place with 2,989 units in sales in the January-February period and a market share of 16.8 percent, against Isuzu's 15.1 percent.

Scoring the No. 3 spot was Honda Cars Philippines Inc., which posted two-month sales of 2,967 units and a market share of 16.7 percent.

$1.6-B net investment outflow seen this year

By Michelle V. Reyes

THE EFFECTS OF THE GLOBAL economic crunch on the Philippines is likely to be concentrated this year by a net outflow of foreign direct investment estimated to reach as much as $1.6 billion.

This was according to Fitch Ratings, which stressed though that the exit of capital would not be peculiar to the Philippines but would be one for all emerging economies suffering the spillover effects of the turmoil resulting from lax regulations in the advanced economies.

A $1.6-billion net outflow will be a reversal of the projected net inflow of foreign capital into the Philippines in 2008.

"We expect lower net capital outflows for almost all emerging markets. [But the Philippines], Fitch forecasts net capital outflows of about $1.6 billion, as that change is not outflows a quite large," James MacCormack, head of Asia Pacific sovereign ratings at Fitch, said in an e-mail to the business.

The international credit rating agency estimated a net capital outflow of $1.6 billion to the Philippines in 2009, or the same level as the January-November figure reported by the Bangko Sentral ng Pilipinas.

The BSP is expected to release the full-year foreign direct investment data for 2008 today.

FDIs in January to November last year, although staying in the positive territory, was a 41-percent drop from the $3.76 billion it net inflows registered in the same period the previous year. Analysts said the decline signaled a possible near-term drop in the net inflows of FDIs this year, when the global economy is seen to plunge deeper into recession.

The BSP blamed the measly net inflow to FDIs as of November to the growing risk aversion by investors, as speculated by the global turmoil.

Economic managers have explained that the Philippines, while maintaining sound regulatory policies for the banking sector, could not be immune from the ill-effects of the financial meltdown in the United States and Europe.

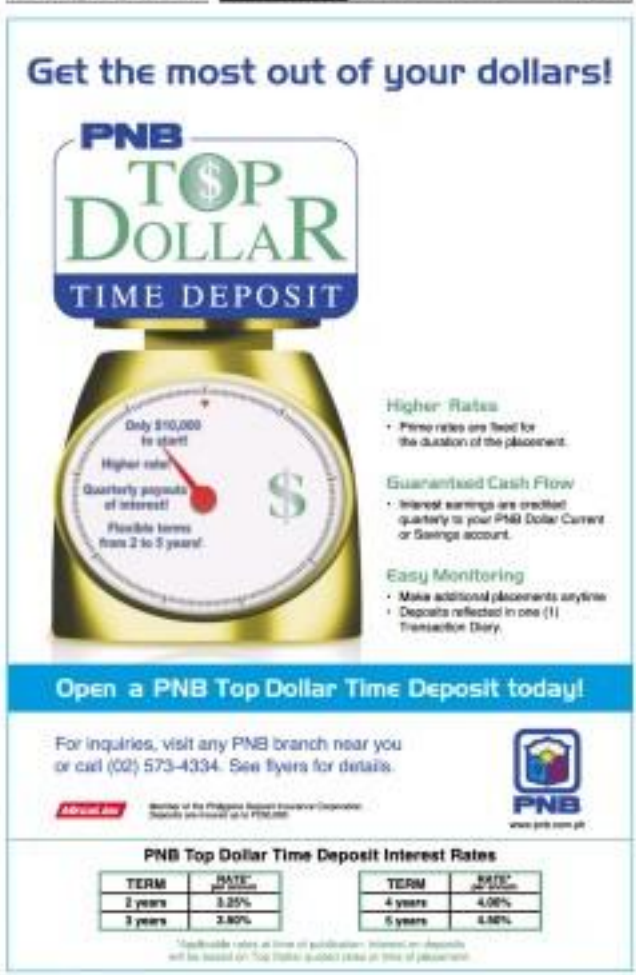
This is because the expected global recession, seen to be led by contractions in the advanced economies, would send investors by unplug their assets and thus pulling in resources even those from emerging markets.

Officials, however, said the Philippines was unlikely to suffer from contraction and would only likely post a slower growth this year. The government expects the domestic economy to grow between 3.7 and 4.4 percent this year from the previous year's 4.6 percent.

The projected slowdown is attributed to weaker investments, which in turn could result in slight unemployment and restricted consumption by households.

Fitch agrees that the Philippines, where officials credit bank regulations reforms adopted after the Asian crisis for avoiding the worse financial meltdown seen in rich countries, would only decelerate this year instead of record a contraction.

But Fitch is more pessimistic than the government's economists in outlook, setting its own growth for the Philippines for the year at 2 percent.



IMF needs new role, says ex-chief

By Michelle V Rosario

Multilateral lender's weakness exposed by financial meltdown

MICHEL CAMDESSUS, THE FORMER managing director of the International Monetary Fund, said the global crisis has proven anew that the multilateral lending institution has become irrelevant and, as such, needs a brand new mandate.

Speaking during a forum yesterday on the global crisis organized by the Asian Development Bank, Camdessus said broadening the role of the IMF has become indispensable in the light of the financial meltdown in advanced economies due to happening right before the very eyes of its officials.

Under the existing mandate of the IMF, the organization is tasked with providing financial assistance to member countries suffering from liquidity shortages, specifically those that manifest through balance of payments (BOP) or current account deficits.

But Camdessus said the IMF should go beyond helping lower economies' BOP and current accounts, and instead be able to assist in efforts to beef up their overall economic development.

Camdessus also said the IMF should be sufficiently tasked with monitoring the adequacy of monetary and financial regulations being implemented in member countries, and with deterring early signs of regulatory loopholes that could be ready to the future.

"We need a brand new International Monetary Fund. Changes in its mandate is indispensable for the IMF to do full surveillance and avoid the 'schizophrenia,'" Camdessus said during the ADB forum attended by bankers, regulators and financial market players from various countries. The forum was held at the ADB's headquarters in Mandaluyong City.

Camdessus, who said he has been pressing for reforms in the IMF for years, said the change in mandate should have been done soon after the 1997 Asian financial crisis. He expressed regret that more than a decade since the Asian crisis, the IMF has failed to adapt to the challenges of the global economy.

He said the Asian financial crisis and the present global turmoil should not have happened if institutions were in place monitoring the appropriateness of regulatory policies.

"The problem today is that the institutions in charge are not anymore entered to be able to cope with the dimensions of the crisis," Camdessus said.

The former IMF chief headed the 183-nation multilateral funder at the height of the Asian financial crisis. His policies then were criticized by developing nations like Malaysia for having been insensitive to the plight of the poor.

Besides suggesting for the IMF's adoption of a new mandate, Camdessus also proposed that it appoint under a global financial and monetary governance body wherein all countries are represented. The body shall be able to issue regulatory policies on cross-financial and monetary activities that have international impact, and those that are not covered by domestic regulatory policies.

"No activity should be left unregulated," Camdessus said, noting this was a key lesson learned from the current crisis. He pointed out that the ongoing global turmoil is blamed partly on lax regulation over the sale of derivatives packaged with risky sub-prime market assets.

Camdessus suggested that Asian countries like the Philippines take the lead role in curating the global body, saying that international institutions should give special attention for developing countries.

"It is important to make sure developing countries have a say even on the top level. All countries should have a voice," Camdessus said.

The former IMF chief expressed hope that countries making up the G8 and the G20 will be able to deliberate on the proposed IMF reforms, as well as the creation of a global body that will serve as watchdog for financial and monetary regulation matters.

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ADB to ask members for capital hike

THE PRESIDENT OF THE ASIAN DEVELOPment Bank is urging the institution's shareholders to increase its capitalization by nearly 200 percent, saying the magnitude of the global turmoil requires much more assistance to ensure member countries survive the crisis.

"For us to deliver our mission of poverty reduction in Asia most effectively, ADB needs an immediate and substantial capital increase, and we are asking our shareholders to reach an agreement by the upcoming annual meeting in Bali in May," ADB president Haruhiko Kuroda said during a forum on the global crisis held yesterday at its headquarters in Mandaluyong City.

In a press briefing in between sessions of the forum, Kuroda said shareholders of the multilateral agency are being urged to contribute more funds that will result in a 200-percent increase in capitalization.

According to data from the ADB website, its authorized and subscribed capital stock as of end-2007 amounted to $55 billion.

The ADB earlier planned to extend $12 worth of official development assistance to member countries for this year.

But Kuroda said the lending institution was mulling an increase in this amount so that member countries would enjoy more assistance amid the global turmoil.

"We remain deeply concerned about four inter-related impacts of the global economic downturn on Asia," Kuroda said.

Citing an ADB study, Kuroda said major cities are affected by the global crisis in four areas. These would come through declining exports, the exit of foreign direct investments, tightening credit and reduced remittances.

Although the global turmoil has caused many advanced economies to dip into recession, neither are developing countries in Asia (like the Philippines spared from its ill-effects). This is because the United States and Europe, produced to go deeper into recession this year, are the region's two main export markets.

The adverse impact of the turmoil on the Philippines' trade performance was manifested through the 3-percent drop in exports last year. Projections also point to lower export income this year. Michelle V Rosario

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After 60 years, Circuit City closes doors

CIRCUIT City employees gather outside the Union Square electronics store as it closes on the final day of business on Sunday, March 8, in New York. The chain erased 567 store nationwide, leaving more than 34,000 employees jobless. –P

RICHMOND, VIRGINIA—WHAT began 60 years ago as a humble television store in this sleepy Southern capital ended Sunday as Circuit City closed its doors for good—its 567 remaining US stores to be left brown dust and ruins.

For the last month and a half, a group of four liquidators have conducted going-out-of-business sales for what was America's second-largest consumer electronics retailer, selling its remaining $1.7 billion worth of inventory weeks sooner than expected.

In its wake Richmond-based Circuit City Stores Inc. will leave more than 1.67 million square meters of vacant space in a faltering real estate market. And more than 34,000 employees, many who worked through the liquidation announced in January, will be jobless. Shareholders will likely get nothing and creditors may receive far less than what they are owed.

Circuit City filed for bankruptcy protection in November with hopes of reorganizing as a cheaper competitor able to compete in the ever-expanding marketplace, shedding its $2.32 billion in debt and getting out of older real estate.

Unable to work out a sale or secure new financing, the company will instead spend its remaining days selling money from the sale of its assets, breaking or assigning its leases and paying off its growing list of creditors.

Circuit City owes nearly $623 million to its 50 largest unsecured creditors—mostly vendors who supplied the DVDs, flat-screen TVs and headphones at Circuit City shelves. They hope only to be paid a small percentage of what they are owed.

A small staff will remain at the corporate office during the wind-down process, but Circuit City's bookkeeping may ultimately be reduced to a laptop computer tossing small business accounting software.

Over the last few years, Circuit City, which at its height had more than 700 stores, faced heightened competition, pressure from creditors and waning customer spending. Ultimately, the bobbled credit market and economic worries proved insurmountable. The dismal retail economy also has claimed retailers including KB Toys and Sharper Image.

Circuit City, which posted losses in seven of its final eight quarters, had its brand value diminished in the 1990s as it lost significant ground to rivals like Best Buy Co., which built bigger stores in better locations and achieved greater economies of scale. Wal-Mart Stores Inc. and others who have expanded their electronics offerings also wooed Circuit City customers.

Around the country, stores were full of televisions, stereos, computers and other consumer electronics and little merchandise left on the last day of business, with many locations selling store fixtures like shelves and video cable and reels.

Inside a store in Little Rock, Arkansas, a few tables sat in the middle of an empty showroom, with discarded wireless phones and other electronic wiring. A box nearby contained shrink wrap that once guarded the store's digital cameras and camcorders, being sold for 25 cents each.

Bundles with mailboxes clean-settled the store's racks and stands. Tony Greene, 60, of Little Rock, struggled to stuff a rack into the back of his van. AP

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Oil rises above $46 as investors eye cuts

SINGAPORE – OIL PRICES ROSE TO above $46 a barrel Monday as bets on investors anticipated another Opec production cut will shrink global supplies.

Benchmark crude for April delivery was 61 cents to $46.31 a barrel by midday in Singapore on the New York Mercantile Exchange. Oil price rose $1.51 on Friday to settle at $45.52.

The Organization of Petroleum Exporting Countries plans to meet March 15 in Vienna, and some of the group's leaders have said a production cut is likely.

Iranian Oil Minister Gholam Hossein Nozari was quoted by the official Irna news agency Sunday saying Opec members have "almost" completely complied with the 4.2-million barrels a day of output quota reduction announced since September.

Nozari also said Opec should ensure supply policy with non-Opec producers.

"Oil is still a primary line in the speculation that Opec will cut production," said Victor Shum, an energy analyst with consultancy Purvin & Gertz in Singapore. "The market in the last week or two has paid more attention to supply because the Opec cuts have shown up in the data."

The government said last week that US crude inventories fell for a second week in three, hitting a trend over the previous six weeks that saw inventories jump more than 30 million barrels.

Most analysts expect Opec to announce a cut of at least 300,000 barrels a day, though the cartel's biggest producer, Saudi Arabia, hasn't yet commented on the possibility of further output reductions.

"The Saudis are the most important voice," Shum said. "They typically don't say anything until the day before a meeting."

Oil has traded near $40 a barrel since December after plummeting from $147 in July as crude demand fell amid the worst global recession in decades.

Oil investors often look to stock markets as a measure of sentiment, but the overall economic bad news has risen from below $35 a barrel last month despite the major US equity indexes plunging to 12-year lows last week. AP

BUSINESS

Increased use of natural fiber pushed

By Riza T. Olchondra

THE DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE is promoting the use packaging materials made up of natural fiber to promote the local product while helping curb the use of environmentally harmful, non-biodegradable materials such as plastics.

The department said the Fiber Industry Development Authority was talking to local government officials, business leaders and environmentalists on how to promote the use of abaca and cassava packaging materials for commercial establishments.

Unlike plastics or synthetics that harm the environment as these materials do not decompose, abaca-based packaging materials are recyclable and biodegradable.

The department said Iloilo was promoting the use of natural fiber in commercial establishments in Molave City and Mandaluyong City.

The Makati City government has a local ordinance regulating the use of plastics in their locality. This opens up opportunities for abaca-based packaging materials.

Marikina City and the Rotary Club of Quezon 2000 in Marikina are working with Fida in conducting training programs, particularly on making abaca paper and fiber mats into packaging for various industries.

The DA said in a statement that in 2008, the Philippines produced some 77,000 metric tons of abaca fiber, 27.5 percent higher than the 2007 level.

The Philippines supplies about 85 percent of the world requirement for abaca.

SMC eyeing gov't stake in PNOC-EC

San Miguel Energy Corp. expected to join the bidding

By Doris C. Dumlao
and Amy Remo

SAN MIGUEL CORP. IS INTERested in bidding for the government's 40-percent stake in PNOC Exploration Corp., the upstream oil and gas subsidiary of state-owned Philippine National Oil Co.

This was confirmed to the business by SMC president Ramon Ang yesterday.

The government hopes to bid out its 40-percent stake in PNOC-EC to the first semester of the year.

PNOC-EC is listed as the Philippine Stock Exchange but its shares are not traded because of its limited public float. It has 1.99 billion shares, of which 99.79 percent is owned by PNOC.

The company has a market capitalization of P6.7 billion based on the value of its A and B shares.

The government is hoping to raise more than P10 billion from the privatization of its 40-percent stake in PNOC-EC.

PNOC president Antonio Cuñao, in a separate interview, said San Miguel would be a "good prospect" for the privatization exercise.

"They're getting into power in a very strong way to good luck [to them]. At the end of the day, it will be up to us [to] weigh a bidding."

Cuñao added that several other prospective investors had expressed interest in PNOC-EC. We, however, declined to name them.

He said PNOC was waiting for the financial markets to improve before finalizing the bidding schedule for PNOC-EC.

"We're waiting for the market to stabilize. We noticed that the market is improving, the more we wait [the better]," Cuñao said.

SMC is expected to bid for PNOC-EC through subsidiary San Miguel Energy Corp.

PNOC-EC operates the country's first natural gas power plant fueling a three-megawatt pilot plant in San Antonio, Isabela that was commissioned in 1994.

The company is also engaged in coal trading operations and integrated services, which is an affiliate from PNOC Coal Corp. in 1992, and operates the Energy Supply Base, a private commercial port for office bunkering, cargo handling, storage and warehousing facilities.

Blame excuse

BREAKTIME

Conrado R. Bautista III

SOMEBODY SIMPLY HAS TO TAKE THE blame for the multibillion-peso giveaway of the Presidential Commission on Good Economics—the PCGE.

But who among the five members of the PCGE commission on hand is willing to take up the tadpole for the rest? No, er, none of them is.

And so—what: do you know, Stefano—somebody's name at the Palace is dropping up in business circles.

PCGE insiders are saying that top PCGE officials have been dragging the name of no less than the Lola at the Palace in the controversial giveaway.

Top PCGE officials claimed they pressured-me from the Palace to accept a "compromise settlement," unwisely proposed by Ongpin & Co. Ltd. Partnership, or OCLP through operatives with top PCGE officials.

And now the "compromise settlement" is, well, compromised?

Most about it already leaked out. We heard the "compromise settlement" between the PCGE and OCLP is a done deal except for the actual signing of the documents. And so now word got around that the PCGG is pointing at the Palace, saying it was done under somebody's instructions.

The deal involves 18.4 hectares of prime land in Pasig City adjacent to the Ortigas Center, now the site of "Mercawoodz."

OCLP has been claiming it sold the lot to the late former President Ferdinand Marcos, or some companies fronting for him, under duress.

Problem: The only witness of OCLP to the alleged pressure exerted by Marcos is already dead.

Our info is that, even way back in the 1980s, the Marcos-Imelda company paid to the Ortigas group P40 per square meter for the property, which was still a sea land then, although the going rate of land at the Greenhills area was only P10 per square meter.

So up to now, the case filed by OCLP before the Sandiganbayan involving the property is still pending.

Yet, under the "compromise settlement," OCLP simply promised it would drop the case provided the PCGG would give to OCLP 6.5 hectares of the property—for free.

That PCGG Chairman giveaway could easily be worth P1 billion.

And so it seems that, for the PCGG, such a "compromise settlement" is not just going to pass unnoticed.

For one, other groups also filed court cases involving the property, including the former stockholders of OCLP who opted to get out of the then-ailing.

How do you, if you are the PCGG officials, party for controversy?

Well, just say you it was all a political decision, not a decision to the long-standing judicial issue that seems to have reached a dead end.

And so you point at somebody else such as the President of the Republic.

Holcim gets ₱2.45-B loan from BDO

By Doris C. Dumlao

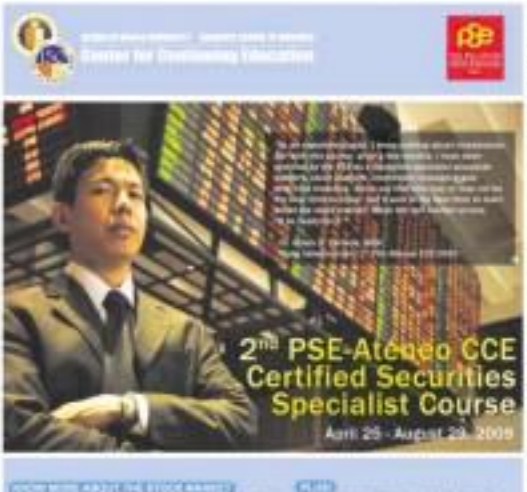
CEMENT MAKER HOLCIM PHILIPpines Inc. has obtained a P2.45-billion loan from retail tycoon Henry Sy's Banco de Oro Unibank to refinance maturing short-term borrowings.

Holcim chief operating officer Ian Tinsley said in a statement the loan demonstrated "the banking community's continued trust and confidence in Holcim as a strong and credit-worthy company."

Tinsley added the newly signed loan agreement reflected the optimism shared by Holcim and BDO on the resilience of the Philippine economy.

Holcim is involved in the manufacture, sale and distribution of four cement brands, namely, Holcim Premium Cement, Holcim Ordinary Cement, Holcim Supreme Cement and Holcim Multiplus Cement. It is also a wholesale seller of clinker, the pebble rock-like substance used as basic input in cement manufacturing.

The company was the result of the consolidation of Ilo Cement Corp., Davao Union Cement Corp. and Bacnotan Cement Corp., with Ilo Cement as the surviving entity in 2002. The company acquired Atlas Cement Corp. and led to another change in corporate name to Holcim Philippines.



Exchange suspends trading of Phoenix Petroleum shares

By Amy R. Remo

THE PHILIPPINE STOCK EXCHANGE HAS suspended the trading of Phoenix Petroleum Philippines Inc.'s shares due to its failure to submit documents pertaining to its recent acquisitions.

According to the PSE, the company did not comply with the requirements of Section 5 of the Revised Disclosure Rules on Disclosure for Reverse Takeovers.

Prior to shareholders, head of the PSE disclosure department, said the suspension was in relation to Phoenix Petroleum's March 6 disclosure where it told the exchange that the Phoenix board had approved and authorized the purchase of Batangas Industrial Park Corp. The deal involved the purchase of about 4 million shares of BIPC.

Phoenix said it did not submit the documents asked by the PSE because the purchase agreement had yet to be finalized.

BIPC is the owner and operator of Batangas Union Industrial Park (BUIP), a 186-hectare industrial park in Calaca, Batangas. The property included an L-shaped multi-purpose port facility.

In the same disclosure, Phoenix Petroleum said it had also acquired 1.9 Ha land in BUIP which was owned by Pirtona.

Phoenix Petroleum is the first independent oil firm to be listed on the PSE. It held its initial public offering in July 2007.

From being family business, Bruno Gil Tensuan Investors Corp. expanded following the deregulation of the oil industry and was renamed Phoenix Petroleum in 2000.

Piltel buys back 25M shares

By Elizabeth S. Lacson

PILIPINO TELEPHONE CORP., A UNIT OF Philippine Long Distance Telephone Co., spent P187 million to buy back 25 million of its shares on March 6 and 9.

In a disclosure, Piltel said it bought a total of 25 million shares at P7.40 to P7.50 per share in three transactions on March 6 and 9.

The transactions are as follows: 9 1,240 shares purchased at P7.50 (March 9); 5 million shares bought at P7.48, and 19,998 million shares at P7.50 apiece (March 6).

In an earlier disclosure, Piltel said its board authorized on March 2 the purchase of up to 25 billion of its common shares representing 6.2 percent of Piltel's outstanding shares.

This was on top of an earlier buyback program that involved 38 million shares which was announced on Nov. 3. It completed the buyback of 38 million shares but January amid the continued weakness in the stock market.

Piltel earlier reported a net income of P1.1.2 billion in 2008, up 37 percent from P8.3 billion in 2007.

Editor Thelma Sioson San Juan

LIFESTYLE Wellness

'You need a good set of strong arms'

When celebs try wakeboarding

EXTREME RUSH. Learning how to wakeboard in Camsur is surprisingly affordable.

JOEY Marquez with Camarines Sur Gov. Lray Villafuerte

GARY Estrada learning how to wakeboard in Camsur

HIGHLY competitive team captain for the Red team, the spirit-tempered John Estrada

CWC the water entertainment center of Asia," he said.

Now on its third year in the watersports industry, Villafuerte said the region is already reaping the profit of their P100-million investment. On its first year alone, CWC earned a gross profit of P75 million; last year it made $66 million. Once named among the poorest provinces in the country, Camarines Sur is now the 10th richest province in terms of income, thanks mostly to the commissioning of the CWC.

Lago del Rey event was organized by Marlen Stollet and LetsPlay.

Text and photos by Anne A. Jamboco

CAMSUR'S world-class wakeboarding complex has earned its place in the world map for wakeboarders

CELEBRITIES TROOPED TO THE Camsur Watersports Complex (CWC) in Bicol, over lanzeta over the world for wakeboarding, for the unveiling of its latest playground, Lago del Rey, an 18-ha man-made lake just across from the wakeboard cable lake-area.

Lago del Rey is the recreation area for the entire family, a breakaway from extreme sports CWC is known for. It has watersports entertainment—giant waterslides, aqua wall climbing, water polo, paddle surfing, aqua obstacle course, kayaking, water volleyball, skiing, dragon-boating, bun-towed wakeboarding and parasailing.

The P320-million Lago de Rey also has a Kids' Activity Center with water-oriented sports and entertainment for children.

"With Lago del Rey families, friends and kids can truly enjoy an unforgettable getaway in a place which caters to whatever watersports they prefer," said Camarines Sur Gov. Lray Villafuerte.

For fun, celebrities and media did a celebrity challenge—water volleyball, paddle surfing, giant waterslide race and other water obstacle-race oriented games.

Having fun were Gary Estrada, Bobby Yan, Claudine Trillo, Irene Arellano, Jhonas Gaisano, Marc Nelson, Dyan Castillejo, Lj Moreno, Gene Uddon, John Estrada, Priscilla Meirelles, Warren Adonis, Raymond Gutierrez, Joey Marquez, Lucis Jimenez, Benj Benz and Ida Henares.

"I think my numerous experience has helped me learn wakeboarding a little quicker than I probably should," said actor Gary Estrada.

His first time to wakeboard, Estrada took a quick breakfast after his morning lessons before hitting the area again for yet more rounds of wakeboarding routines, a well-grounded, self-deprecating man, Estrada said he needed to rest his arms because he is no longer as energetic as the younger rybids in the group.

On his way back to the wakeboard area he was joined by others, such as John Estrada, the very-also racing to on the spot with his girlfriend Priscilla Meirelles, in the "rider's only" area. Everyone quickly learned their wakeboarding a soon as easy as it looks.

"You need a good sense of balance and a good set of strong arms to keep on going and going for several minutes. It looks easy but the cable really pulls hard on your arms," Estrada said.

For the celebrity challenge squadron, the group was divided into five color teams. Governor Villafuerte was in the Blue team with Gary Estrada as captain. They won first prize—for each member five accommodation and wakeboard lessons. The Red team led by John Estrada was second.

"We're urging once we our commitments of bringing only the best and the newest watersports park not only here in the Philippines but all over the world. Lago de Rey will bring families together doing one activity or spending time together in one location to the park," Villafuerte said.

A "whim Party" set off the weekend activities as guests donned their best white dresses and enjoyed spicy Bicol dishes such as the popular laing.

The world champion Philippine Dragon Boat Team, who trains and practices in the watercourse courses of Camsur, also made a brief demonstration.

CWC is already the leading tourist destination in Bicol, Villafuerte said. With the launch of Lago del Rey he is optimistic tourists arrivals will rise by at least 50 percent. "With the addition of Lago del Rey, we're making CWC the water entertainment center of Asia," he said.

Now on its third year in the watersports industry, Villafuerte said the region is already reaping the profit of their P100-million investment. On its first year alone, CWC earned a gross profit of P75 million; last year it made $66 million. Once named among the poorest provinces in the country, Camarines Sur is now the 10th richest province in terms of income, thanks mostly to the commissioning of the CWC.

Lago del Rey event was organized by Marlen Stollet and LetsPlay.

CAMSUR'S world-class wakeboarding complex has earned its place in the world map for wakeboarders

YOUNG comedian Ryan Yllana

BRAZILIAN beauty queen Priscilla Meirelles

WATER volleyball is not as easy as it looks

MODEL-Cauldron Bike-interviewing actor Gary Estrada before he gives wakeboarding a shot.

CELEBRITY challenge, composed of members of the media and show biz, drew a huge crowd.

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For men who want to lose that bulging and unsightly belly quickly and easily, now there is a solution! Plastic surgeons have invented a machine that can "melt away" stubborn tummy fat in a patient's lunchbreak - **ULTRASHAPE**. This treatment gets rid of unwanted bulges and, unlike liposuction, does not require surgery. It's very effective in removing excess stomach fat, love handles or fat in other areas.

FAST, EFFECTIVE and SAFE. It's the most advanced non-invasive method of fat reduction to date. It works by focusing high frequency ultrasound waves from outside the body to targeted areas. These ultrasound waves break down fat cells without damaging blood vessels or other tissues. The fat cells are then eliminated through natural processes over a period of about 3 weeks. In the same way the body dissipates the discoloration from a bruise.

In 2000, Ultrashape was founded in USA by Ami Glickman M.D., formerly a senior plastic surgeon and Yoram Eshel, PhD, MBA, a leading expert in high-power ultrasound technology. When they developed Ultrashape, it was well known that ultrasound waves were able to break down and destroy fat cells, releasing the fat contained within them. Glickman and Eshel built on that to come up with the unique concept of Ultrashape.

Ultrashape is the first and only non-surgical fat-destroying treatment. It promises a reduction of up to 2 cm. in a single session. It is such a hassle-free procedure. You walk in, get the treatment and go straight to your next appointment. It's as easy as that. Absolutely no anesthesia, no pain and no recovery is needed. Patients can resume their normal activities right after a treatment. It does not have the risks of liposuction and can be used to effectively deal with problem areas of fat.

Ultrashape promises an average loss of about 2 cm. in a single treatment.

Normally about 4 or 5 sessions are recommended to fully achieve the result required. Both men and women who have tried it were impressed by the immediate results after just a single session. Proven effective, Ultrashape is definitely a breakthrough in fat reduction.

Ultrashape is now available at **Maria Francia FOR MEN**. Call 913-7958 for your free consultation. All consultations and treatments are strictly conducted in private.

GARFIELD

JL LIPIN

FUGAD BARDY

DICK TRACY

LOVEKNOTS

JAMES BOND

DIVINE COMEDY

BABY BLUES

ATOMO AND WEEGY

TALBOK

KING MACHINE

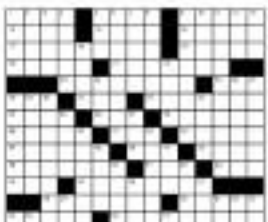
MEN

DAILY CROSSWORD

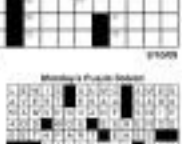
ACROSS
1 Infuriated
5 Car-like cases of
9 White lotion
14 Small cavities
15 Maguire's sidekick
16 Pitch away
17 Tabloid tell-
more lover
19 Shortchange
20 Order aloft
21 Prefix with -gram
23 Uncanny
25 Rent out
28 Classic Tolkien
29 Lose strength
31 Proverbial
words
34 Palm darkens
and dr
36 Bowler shaped
37 Long-time Mets
CPM
39 Breakfast
condiment
40 Gabby Hayes
41 Gadgetry of
yore
44 Lowers
45 Periphery
46 Contemporary
of Hermes
49 Theatre
50 Anatomical
spread
52 Devious
54 Actor
55 Never
success
56 Roseanne
underwear
60 Gumbo
61 Sample
62 "Hooray,
it's unpleasant
person-
ality!"
66 D'Angelo hit
67 Ike Pittsburgh
68 Part of a
procedure
69 Sinister qualities
70 Be without
71 Go

DOWN
1 Nurse chores
2 Push for short
3 Pacify by
4 Hardware
5 Bottle products
6 Big city of
film
7 Live-wire
turkeys
8 Summer
swimmers
9 Wisdom
10 Tattoo
11 "Bottle Talking"
writer
12 Crocodile's
13 Fish (don't cry
eat)
18 Egyptian
goddesses
22 Spike and
Rhonda
24 Tyler or Mann
26 "Strange
new Life"
sitcom girl
27 Purple
dinosaur
30 Sleeper
32 Fighting with
36 "Caribbean
Queen" singer
37 Dodgy
38 Appear to be
41 Beyond
42 Mimic
43 Mr. Ed's pals
47 Actress Pfeiffer
48 Procrastinator
51 Miss Piggy
53 Fitness part
54 Cement's
predecessor
56 Dire Alliance
57 Trivial stuff
58 Rabbit habitat
59 Starts
63 Hole in an
Ugly
64 "Spirited Away"
girl
65 Hungarian
66 Greek letter

By Adele Nazeh
New York, NY



Wondering's Puzzle Solution



HOROSCOPE

BY FRANCIS DRAKE

FREE WILL (March 21 to April 20): Variation is the spice of life, but sometimes the one single entity that you're most sick of is you. Shake things up today. Shoulder it, you might find something about your own habits that's worth appreciation and reverence (or others.)

TAURUS (April 21 to May 20): Be careful what you say today. Words have a way of coming back to haunt you, especially when dealing with co-workers. You underestimate their wisdom. Mum's the word.

GEMINI (May 21 to June 20): It's hard to keep secrets around these times. The mysterious aspects of your chart are quite powerful. Today's Full Moon highlights this. Another bright call.

CANCER (June 21 to July 22): This is a really good time to get your house and your home in order. Take it easy. Slow down. You don't have to be somewhere. Somewhere. The stress of today's full Moon might affect you.

LEO (July 23 to Aug. 22): You want to get your facts in a row, but you're having trouble. Some friends are just annoying, each time. Don't take it personally and maybe they'll stop.

VIRGO (Aug. 23 to Sept. 22): This is the perfect day to get your hair cut. That's why you had to reschedule your appointment. Be patient with others as you would with yourself.

LIBRA (Sept. 23 to Oct. 22): Today's Full Moon makes you a bit edgy and nervous. Be aware of your surroundings and you never know why. It could create problems dealing with co-workers, the person across the table.

SCORPIO (Oct. 23 to Nov. 21): Cosmic cycle dictates a more quiet, of private night for you. Because of its day's full Moon, don't feel to have your mind on when you're getting something off your chest.

SAGITTARIUS (Nov. 22 to Dec. 21): Communication with others, when dealing with romantic partners and romantic partners is the focus of today's full Moon. Chill out.

CAPRICORN (Dec. 22 to Jan. 19): It's hard to know what to put down your home and your family. Don't be afraid to put your point. We, despite the unpleasantness today's full Moon, you cannot ignore home and family.

AQUARIUS (Jan. 20 to Feb. 18): Spend this day alone with others. Avoid money, work and romance. Be alone and clear your head. Today's full Moon, make it a point also to do two things today.

PISCES (Feb. 19 to March 20): Be extra patient with partners and friends. Today's full Moon is the one full Moon that opposes your sign (Virgo). Stay sane.

CONCEPTIS SU DOKU

Conceptis Sudoku By Dave Green

		2						7
		1			6	9		
	6		9	5	8			
8						1		3
4	9						6	2
2		6						5
			8	1	9		3	
		8	2			5		
6						8		

Difficulty Level ★★

(c) Conceptis Puzzles, Dist. by King Features Syndicate, Inc.

HOW TO PLAY SU DOKU

Fill the grid so that every column, every row and every 3x3 box contains the digits 1 to 9.
Tips and program at www.sudoku.com

Answer to previous puzzle

8	3	2	9	6	5	4	7	1
7	5	6	1	3	4	2	8	9
1	9	4	7	2	8	5	3	6
9	1	5	4	7	2	3	6	8
6	2	7	3	8	1	9	4	5
3	4	8	5	9	6	1	2	7
4	7	9	6	5	3	8	1	2
2	8	3	6	1	9	7	5	4
5	6	1	2	4	7	6	9	3

How to prevent weight gain during vacation

By Mitch Felipe
Contributor

VACATION MEANS TAKING YOUR mind off from work while having fun.

But weight gain easily happens if you visit popular food destinations. This can be controlled with discipline and right thinking.

Before you pretend to your planned vacation, research about the most popular local foods and learn about calories from books, the Internet or your dietician.

My client who had a successful vacation in Thailand last month did not gain weight since she was able to apply some effective strategies we discussed before her travel. She munched on the calories of Thai foods like her favorite Pad Thai which led her to limit it to 1/3 to 1/2 of the regular serving.

Eat a moderate breakfast

The best way to prevent eating what-

BANGKOK food

ever is available is to eat breakfast. Don't sleep too late so you can wake up on time and eat the most important meal of the day.

As much as possible, avoid breakfast buffets, but if your hotel booking includes free breakfast, set a limit by asking to your regular breakfast portion which can be a cup worth of cereals, whole wheat bread (ask waiter), 1-2 cups of fresh fruits, 1-2 servings (1 serving size is a deck of cards) of meat, fish and or chicken.

Emergency food

Be smart to get hungry while sue shopping. Bring healthy emergency snacks and eaten once this will save you from buying tempting snack foods. Bring crackers which only contain 120-135 calories per pack as compared to cheeseburger, regular fries and soft drinks, which are about 800-1,000 calories.

Share food

You can influence your travel companion to eats effective and healthy ways. First, bring your companion to restaurants serving healthy food. The other way is to share food with your partner so both of you can control the portion.

Or split food with your friend so you won't repeat the same order during your adventures. This will also save you from eating more for every meal.

Explore healthy food

Try healthy food options like fruits or vegetables. In Bangkok, I was able to enjoy fresh healthy seasonal fruits like dried fruits, Thai salads, soups in low-oil ways broth and steamed dumplings. It's the adventure of finding delicious and guilt-free Thai foods that really made the trip fun and worthwhile.

Walk most of the time

Traveling will most probably make you eat more and keep your mind away from exercise because you are miles away from your gym and/or trainer. Based on food records of people who went on vacations, I have observed that it's definitely more than what they actually eat on a regular day.

Prevent weight gain by walking the whole day while shopping. With my Bangkok trip, I averaged 20,000 steps in a day. So don't forget to bring your pedometer whenever you travel so you know how much physical activity you are doing.

Look for a park

Aside from walking, find the nearest park near your hotel where you can jog or do continuous brisk walking so you won't have a hard time bringing back your exercise routine.

I was able to run in Bangkok's Lumpini park which has markers every 100 meters up to 2.5 kilometers. Just completing a 10km run in the park with some joggers made me feel great and strong.

E-mail the author at mitchfelipe@gmail.com

CHILDREN learn to appreciate traditional Filipino outdoor games

FILIPINA Olympic gold medalist Akiko Thompson with Susie Serrano and Paolo Abrera

'Larong Pinoy' teaches teamwork, respect and winning attitude

By Anne A. Jamboro

MOVE OVER, WE SPORTS. Grand old dichotomized trash. Retired Filipino games are resurrected to their former glory, thanks to Johnson's Baby Powder's "Larong Pinoy: Laro ng Morning Bayani" held recently at the Shangri-la Mall, Mall of Asia.

Bringing together 17 twins in the frenetic Manila Area, seven and eight-year-olds participated in "whole-day tournament of "rediscovered" Filipino games: Luksong Ma-Tinik, Tumbang Preso, Patintero, Bahay-Bahayan and Tiyo-Siyap.

For each game, a core value is learned. Luksong Ma-Tinik teaches children the value of respecting other people's lives. Same value, as of teamwork, Tumbang Preso to the winning attitude, and Tiyo-Siyap physical and mental acuity.

"Outdoor sports help instill our children true people of good values and strong character," said Christine Bellegas, group brand manager, Johnson's Baby Powder.

Launched in 2007, Johnson's Baby Powder aims to develop core values through outdoor games. Since the advocacy grows each year, this time the company took a bolder step by hosting the first interschool tournament.

Aims: a salute to the athlete—aptly referred to as the Morning Bayani—mothers took the Mommy Pledge, vowing to support traditional Filipino games by participating in and encouraging their children to play the games. It was a pledge that sealed the deal on how without Johnson's Baby Powder is in reviving the fading interest in these wholesome sports, more specifically traditional Filipino games.

Get active

"Get into sports, get active and have fun," said swimming gold medalist and past Olympian Akiko Thompson. Thompson, who began swimming at age six and represented the country at 13, said sports not only boosts one's health but is also an excellent tool in molding the mind of a young boy or girl.

The children also said their reasons in joining Morning Bayani Pledge, which reminded them to apply values learned in sports to other aspects of their personal lives. While sports encourages one to be disciplined, have goals and aim for the

PGH doctors step up fight against cervical cancer by offering affordable HPV vaccination

by Eric Michael Santos

Dr. Rhodel Mandalawe is chief, OB-GYN Department of Obstetrics and Gynecology, Philippine General Hospital

From 1990 to 2005, the incidence rate of cervical cancer in the country has remained a relatively high 22 per 100,000 women. Almost 7 out of 10 cases are diagnosed in the advanced stage when the chance of dying from the disease is high. About 6 out of 10 Filipino women with cervical cancer will die within 5 years.

These sobering facts compelled a group of obstetrics-gynecologists—subspecialists in the University of the Philippines Philippine General Hospital (UP-PGH) to implement an advocacy program aimed at making human papillomavirus (HPV) vaccination accessible to more Filipinos.

Taking first steps of a long journey

Started in December 2008, the advocacy program is initially focusing on socio-civic organizations, private schools, and corporations.

"We explain to members of these groups the benefits and cost of HPV vaccination and that through our advocacy program, we no longer charge a certain professional fee for the vaccination," said Dr. Rhodel Mandalawe, Jr., chief, UP-PGH Department of Obstetrics and Gynecology, Section of Infectious Diseases (OB-IDS).

To date, the program has started vaccinating members of the Rotary Club of Quezon City and is set to complete the vaccination doses of employees of the Makati branch of a major commercial bank. Dr. Mandalawe said his group are currently working with schools to provide immunization against HPV and other vaccine-preventable diseases to the school's teachers and office staff. Members of these groups often have their husband or wife and children vaccinated as well.

"The goal is to vaccinate teachers, employees and, hopefully, students by the end of the year," said Dr. Mandalawe.

Dr. Mandalawe is negotiating with PGH management to make discounted HPV vaccines available to hospital patients as well. "We hope our advocacy serves as an example to other government hospitals."

Lower vaccine cost, broader coverage

"We hope that through our advocacy, my colleagues and the government will realize the public health value of our advocacy and eventually support it," Dr. Mandalawe revealed. He pointed out that his group does not make any profit from their advocacy and they sometimes spend their own money on syringes and other vaccination paraphernalia.

"Our long-term goal is the inclusion of HPV vaccination in our national immunization program. We hope Senator Pia Cayetano, who championed hepatitis B vaccination in the country, can help us achieve this goal," Dr. Mandalawe concluded.

The day I found out I'm hypertensive

By Jake Ramirez
Contributor

ONE FINE SATURDAY AFTERNOON, while in a clubhouse, I found out I was hypertensive. No, I did not get involved in a "fine-for-all" activity like that infamous brawl in a golf course's clubhouse east of Manila.

I was in the Isaacic Club Filipino in Greenhills when Medical City's Dr. Abraham informed me I was hypertensive after taking my blood pressure reading with his sphygmomanometer.

I was shocked, given the fact that I am only 33 and thoroughly told the doctor maybe it was the pork rind cracklings I ate before. I feared co-after that caused the spike. The doctor told me I am an ideal candidate for hypertension given that my BMI (body mass index) is already 32, which is already on the obese side of the scale. With heart attack cited as the top cause of mortality among Filipinos, I panicked and promised to lose weight ASAP.

This was too much information I received while attending Reader's Digest's Ireland Takeover soon to be unleashed. The country's theme was "The Heart, A Special Event Yet Heart Matters," was held in cooperation with The Medical City last Feb. 21 in the Gabriel Ram Room of Club Filipino.

Activities for the heart

Participants were treated to an hour of light exercises ranging from belly dancing, push ups and yoga poses from instructors of Gold's Gym. A series of talks tackling cardiovascular disease (CVD), heart diseases, stroke and blood vessel-related problems were also conducted by Medical City's doctors such as Dr. Paulo Prado, Dr. Michael Tomas Dr. Erde Cinco.

Meanwhile, Dr. Morales and Dr. Abriat were busy doing one-on-one consultations at the clubhouse's pool-side. Aside from my blood pressure reading, revealing like a broken record, the doctors informed the causes of CVD: high blood pressure, smoking, unhealthy diet, obesity/overweight, sedentary lifestyle/ lack of exercise and stress.

Lucky me, I got no case of six-pack factors, and the doctors forgot to mention

MEDICAL City's Dr. Abriat taking a BP reading of an attendee

the lesser-known risk factor, break up/heartbreak. Kidding aside, the talk was very informative. I have to take drastic measures to lower the above-mentioned items. And it made me ask for more product samples to take home.

The Reader's Digest "Take Heart" event was supported by The Medical City, Gold's Gym, Hanson and Sanofi-Synthelabo with Activol, natural plant sterols that lower cholesterol.

Having psychic abilities is Holy Spirit's gift

I WOULD LIKE TO RESPOND IN THIS column the questions or comments made by four readers. Although the questions are different, they are sometimes related.

The first letter comes from Jennilyn, 40. Although open to the ideas I read in books and other writings, she became confused when a leader of their religious group heard her talking about her psychic abilities. The leader said these spirits she sees are "the work of the devil" and that my books "can lead her to evil." Jennilyn asked if I could enlighten her. "I really believe that what I have is part of God's plan," she added.

The second letter comes from Jessica, 40, who said she's a Roman Catholic but joined a Japanese Buddhist sect in which the members are made to chant. But later, she became more interested in chanting and not praying and therefore felt guilty. She stopped joining the Buddhist group because she had no intention of leaving the Catholic faith. She asked, "Am I violating my Catholic faith by doing this chanting?"

The third letter comes from Tess of Divine del Norte. She said, "I became more open to your concepts when I read what you had to say about [Elena de Spirito's] 'The Secret' and the Law of Attraction. You said there are actually

INNER AWARENESS
Jaime T. Licauco

other hidden laws which have not been explained in the book."

She said, "I have a similar experience as Oprah on when you wrote about in your April 2008 column."

The fourth letter comes from Bernardo, who writes, "There are many prayers that New Age followers are vulnerable to devil possession. What can you say?"

Confused leaders

Let's start with Jennilyn's confusion. Don't let opinions of other people bother you. Listen to your own heart and to your reason. Many so-called religious leaders in this country are confused themselves, but they think they have the only true answer to every spiritual question.

Since you asked for my opinion, I would tell you to be uncertain terms that seeing spirits or having other psychic abilities are not necessarily the work of the devil. A lot of saints of the Catholic Church could see spirits and even talk to them. They also have strong psychic abilities like seeing the future, healing the sick and reading other people's minds. I could think of Padre Pio, who exhibited such extraordinary psychic abilities that the Church got afraid and prohibited him from teaching or writing books. Having psychic abilities such as prophecy, healing, speaking in tongues, etc. are gifts of the Holy Spirit, according to St. Paul.

My books are based on scientific investigations and controlled experiments. They have nothing to do with the occult or belief systems, whether true or untrue. So these ideas are always listed at the back of my books, so that readers can check for themselves whether they are factually based or not.

Jessica's question of substitute chanting violates her Catholic faith is not for me to answer because I do not represent the Catholic Church nor any religious group for that matter. That question is better addressed to a Catholic priest. But since she asked the question, let me answer it. Chanting puts one in a meditative state known in many scientific terms as the "alpha" or "theta" brain wave levels. There's nothing wrong with that, as far as I am concerned.

You did not really have a question. I appreciate her remark that even though she's Roman Catholic she's open to my ideas, which she considers to be unique and not commonplace.

Bernardo's question is what a lawyer in elementary logic or in argumentation would call a leading question: "Is it true that New Age followers are vulnerable to devil possession?"

This depends on what you mean by the word New Age, because I myself have difficulty trying to understand what this word means. I am not at all a believer of the so-called New Age Movement.

Actually, everyone is vulnerable to spirit possession, whether from the devil (if he really exists) or from angelic spirits, especially spirits of the dead (which definitely exist). Vulnerability to spirit possession is a function of one's spiritual strength and purity, not one's protective name or nom shield. Even Catholic priests and nuns have been known to be possessed by the devil or negative spirits.

Note: The next Basic OSP and Intuitive Development seminar will be held March 14-15, 9 a.m.-5 p.m. at Rm. 308 Prince Plaza 1, Legaspi St., Legaspi Village, Makati. Call 8107249 or 9926808; fax 813-9899; e-mail jaimelicauco@yahoo.com.

What's healthy for body, mind and spirit

MOST PEOPLE CONSIDER time as something that can wait. Let's leave it on a typical conversation between two women:

Mary Ann: Let's share this chocolate mousse. This way there would be less calories.

Jane: Oh, but we can always exercise tomorrow. So let's have our dessert each.

In the end, their intention to exercise remained just an idea.

Do you know the purpose of eating? To sustain your body with the energy it needs to move around. But if you have a sedentary life, the excess calories you ingest do not get burned.

In simple terms, injury must have an output. If not, the result is stored fat which means weight gain.

Kindness

Point one on, be kind to your body, mind and spirit.

Give a love kindness can translate to a wellness plan.

When you do an act of kindness, it is something that cannot contain violence. In short, restrain hating people, obsessions/emotions, thoughts and acts.

Include in your diet food that will contribute to your good health.

While there is no such thing as bad food, I still maintain that there are foods you can live without, like junk/fast food fat, and foods laced with preservatives and chemicals and overburdened with sugar or salt.

Likewise, what you feed your body should include healthy fats for the mind and heart. Drive away your darkest fears and thoughts by invoking the light and holding on to your belief in God and the goodness of life.

Lifesavers

Studies have shown that women all over the world have a deficiency of calcium and iron. This means that the average diet of a woman isn't enough to fulfill the nutritional needs of her body.

The lifesaving vitamins and minerals for women are:

- Calcium: This mineral inhibits bone density loss and studies indicate it may even prevent colon cancer.
- Magnesium: This mineral strengthens the heart and addresses the problems of muscle cramps.
- B6: This vitamin guards against depression and assists the body in building up red blood cells. Thus, it is essential to heart health.
- B12: In combination with B6, this vitamin acts as an anti-inflammatory.
- Folic acid: Essential to brain development and power. Also assures a good completion and solids normal state.
- Potassium: This is the get-up-and-go mineral that revitalizes an otherwise exhausted body. Before any physical exertion, have a banana.

Balanced sources of B6, B12, Folic acid and Potassium include: milk, beans, wheat germ, liver, green leafy vegetables, fish, soy products and peanuts.

Detox soak

Add 1 cup of sea salt and 2 drops of tea tree oil or vinegar in hot bath. Mix in 1 cup of coconut milk. Relax for five minutes. This concoction will disinfect your skin while softening it.

Ginger Coco Cooler

Combine in a glass of chilled coconut 1 tbsp. of NFNW organic ginger powder with muscovado sugar. Sip and relax.

Call Shield of Wellness, tel. no. 723 3978.

Affirm: "Today I take charge of my life."

Love and light!

E-mail the author at sexypatrice@hotmail.com or www.e-quest.com.

INSIDE OUT

Cory Quirino

Drive away your darkest fears and thoughts by invoking the light and holding onto your belief in God and the goodness of life

Iyengar yoga classes

TO GIVE MORE PEOPLE A CHANCE to try out this precise and disciplined style of yoga and reap the benefits of this ancient practice for the body and mind, the Iyengar Yoga Center Manila (IYCM), home of the only certified Iyengar yoga teachers in the Philippines, is offering a new schedule of classes, with more options to choose from. Beginners or those new to this style can try out Basic Classes on Mondays at 6:30-7:30 p.m.; Tuesdays, 7:30-8:30 a.m.; Wednesdays, 12:30-1:30 p.m.; Thursdays, 7:30-8:30 a.m. and 6:30-7:30 p.m.; Fridays, 12:30-1:30 p.m.; and Saturdays, 9:30-10:30 a.m. Students who have had some experience and flexibility with backbends and inversions may try out the Second Classes on Tuesdays, 12-1:30 p.m.; Wednesdays, 6:30-8 p.m.; and Fridays, 6-7:30 p.m. Intermediate Classes for advanced students are on Mondays and Thursdays at 11:30 a.m.-1:30 p.m., and require the permission of the teacher to attend. Rates are P500 per class, or P2,900 a month for an unlimited number of classes. A workshop by IYCM director Rima Ortiz is also scheduled on March 27, 5:30-8 p.m.

IYCM is dedicated to this teaching style originated by BKS Iyengar, and is located at 23/F LBZ Tower, 6881 Ayala Ave., Makati City. For more information, call 753-1691 or 0917-5259971 or visit www.iyengar-yoga-manila.com.

Le Soufflé exhibits

For March, the two Le Soufflé outlets in Makati City have the following art exhibits: 4-wonder-boy abstract painter, four-year-old Michael Thomas Pangaduan Hanson, is featured at Le Soufflé, Rockwell Center. Until March 28, Susan Mercado, who paints with acrylic, watercolor and oil, is featured at Le Soufflé, Top of the Silk, 369 Dillman Tower, Paseo de Roxas. At Le Soufflé, The Fort, Taguig City, engineer-turned-

March 14 to a three-way exhibit featuring the watercolor paintings of Gilda Cordero-Fernando; bamboo and paper lamps and lamparas by Melody C. Pagtakhan; and soft sculptures by Alma Quinto.

GOINGS ON

Writing workshop

Tower Book House will hold a writing workshop for children aged 8-10 in April. Classes are divided according to age to facilitate level of participation. The workshop includes techniques in discovering one's writing style, strengthening and applying this style in various forms of communication. From style, the workshop tackles essay writing, feature writing, journalism, short story writing and playwriting. Rates shall be on submission of works which shall be critiqued objectively. Call 897-6003/819-4988; e-mail info@towerbookhouse.com; visit Window Tower 103 Legaspi St., Legaspi Village, Makati.

Rockwell bazaar

Rockwell Urban Bazaar (Special Summer Therapy) will be held March 13-15 at Rockwell Power Plant Mall, 10 a.m.-8 p.m.

Summer workshops for kids

The 2009 Summer Kikomo's Adonia for Kids includes short story writing and book illustrating for kids aged 11-15; book making for six to eleven-year-olds; and storytelling with arts for three to six year-olds. Call 373-3588 loc. 122 or e-mail at gen@adonia.com.ph.

Meanwhile, Adonia House is calling for nominations in retailers in its revised "Libro Mo, Libro Ko program." The winning nominated institution will receive educational reading materials from Adonia House and a partner donor. E-mail nataya@magsaysayadonia.com.ph.

Editor Brenda Q. Mukerjee

ENTERTAINMENT

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Charo's Oscar moment

Next year, the ABS-CBN president hopes to attend again—as a nominee

By Boots Del Castillo Jr
Photos courtesy of ABS-CBN

"NO LIMITS TONIGHT!"

That was what ABS-CBN president and chief operating officer Charo Santos told herself when she attended the Governors Ball, the private post-Oscar party held at the grand ballrooms of Hollywood & Highland today, or the Kodak Theater complex's last month.

Which was just right because the food, whipped up by celebrity chef Wolfgang Puck, was glorious.

"It was great," Santos recounted. "There were lobster, smoked salmon, desserts [and] short ribs.

"And [except for] all [celebrities] Oscar, I ate my [meal]," Santos quipped.

Apart from the feasts inspired scenes, the party itself was a feast for the eyes of any movie fan, she recalled: "The ones were just walking around in the room. I saw Oscar winner Tilda Swinton."

There were no cameras allowed back at the Kodak Theater and the Governors Ball, "I understand because the stars wouldn't be able to eat ... with all the requests for snapshots. I myself would find the picture-taking!"

While waiting for the limos ride back to the hotel, Santos actually bumped into another Oscar winner, Kevin Kline.

"We already had our interviews back there, so I asked for a souvenir shot. He was friendly," Santos said.

Fun for a night

Most of Santos' photos were taken by executives from Disney, who invited her and Manolet Oliver, ABS-CBN cable and print media group head, to the event.

Although she was in a terse by Lory Saavedra, Santos let loose at the Oscars. "All the media executives seemed ashamed to act like fans that night. When Robert De Niro and Anthony Hopkins appeared onstage, we clapped and cheered excitedly."

Anne Hathaway had a grand view of the stage and audience area, she had a chance to see celebrities in candid moments during commercial breaks.

Meryl Streep, the only star she had hoped to see that night, didn't disappoint, she said.

"I adore her. She's elegant and kind-hearted. She was the first to stand up and greet her fellow best actress contenders Anne Hathaway. She's so graceful."

She also fell in love with Hugh Jackman. "The moment man alive! He made the audience feel relaxed during commercial breaks."

How she wished that local productions could emulate the Oscar presentation.

"It didn't feel like four hours," she raved. "The Academy was down on the budget but they still came up with a good show. It was like watching a Broadway play."

Will she attend again next year?

"I don't think I'll get an invitation this early," she said.

Early challenge

She conceded, however, that it would be heavy to attend as a nominee in 2010. "When I was in LA, I called up Melov Santos, [Star Cinema head]. I asked her to look for an Oscar-worthy material. Who knows? It's good to dream."

Her's nearest almost the Oscar members. "It's a challenge that I posed to Star Cinema (ABS-CBN's film arm). I hope they would take it up."

She's lovely master of the dramatic mind: "We cannot do it on our own. The arena is so big, we still never get noticed without a major distributor in the US. That's the best way to do it."

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Glaiza warned against Patrick

By Marinel R. Cruz

GLAIZA DE CASTRO HAS HER SUMMARY reactions" when it comes to dealing with rumored actor Patrick Garcia.

The 23-year-old actress admitted that fans and "concerned friends" have warned her of Patrick's being a bad influence on her. Tabloids also report stories of Patrick's alleged involvement in drugs and gambling.

But on the other hand, Glaiza is giving Patrick the benefit of the doubt. "I will only believe those stories only if I'm presented with proof. I don't prejudge a person," Glaiza told a group of writers at the recent launch of Facial Plus, which she endorses, in Cubao, Quezon City.

Patrick, 26, has a son with ex-youngest girlfriend Jennelyn Mercado. He and Glaiza became friends when Patrick invited her to watch the Rihanna-Chris Brown concert in October.

Since then, they

GLAIZA de Castro

GLAIZA DE

Is Sarah the new Sharon?

FOR YEARS NOW, THE CHRONICLERS have tried to divine the identity of the lucky young female entertainer "fated" to become "the next Sharon Cuneta."

Sharon's star enjoyed a three-decade career in singing, movies, and all-around show biz, so it couldn't possibly "reign" forever.

Occasionally, it was thought that this or that young star stood in the hill, but the putative heiress-apparent eventually lost steam and disappeared from view.

Then came KC Concepcion. Being Sharon's daughter and very popular in her own right, KC looked like the real deal as she, an engaging actress and competently into the Megastar's stellar shoes was concerned.

Her first movie with Richard Gutierrez was a big hit, and that seemed to affirm her "right" to claim Sharon's mantle.

Box-office success

Unfortunately, their follow-up movie reportedly failed to do as well, as that [unexpectedly] impacted KC's upward ascendancy. At around the same time, Sarah Geronimo chalked up her own hit films with John Lloyd Cruz — and their follow-up movie, which is still showing, turned out to be an even bigger success at the box office.

Of course, KC has her legions of fans, and Sarah also has many dedicated advocates, and all of them will root for their personal fave. But, for less partisan and more objective observers, the time has come to ask: "Is Sarah the new Sharon?"

Naturally, KC's supporters would answer in the close negative, and in a sense they would be right, since KC is Sharon's very own daughter and, by rights, should succeed her.

But unlike endorsements go by hereditive genome in these parts, so the two luminous punches of Sarah's names cannot be prudently ruled out.

TV factor

What about the TV factor? Both KC and Sarah have chalked up successes on the small screen, so they appear to be evenly matched there.

And what about talent? Initially, Sarah had the better singing voice, but too much wear and tear (hard livin' underage, accepting too many shows and gigs) has made her a rather sexdrive singer. For her part, KC is less vocally gifted but has taken better care of her vocal resources.

She's also a better dancer than Sarah. And she's a more effective show host than Sarah, who tends to simply vocal her spirit "cheerleader."

Another major consideration is acting talent, and KC has more of that, as well. She can still clearly act circles around Sarah, who tries to get by with sheer energy, youthfulness, ingenue likability and sweetness.

Could Sarah be a more dependable bitmake of that KC became she's younger?

Different backstories

And what about Sarah and KC's different "backstories"? KC was born with a silver spoon on her mouth, while Sarah had to work hard (no pun), in our view) as her family's breadwinner, since she was an adolescent. Could the latter's less relative access to hardships mean of this?

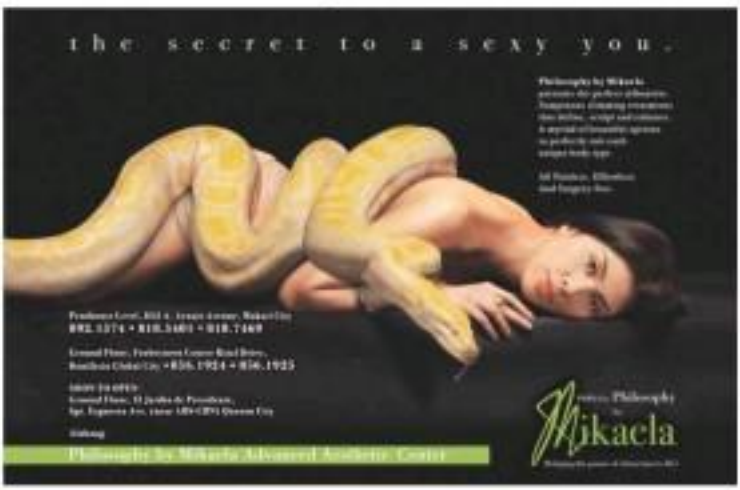
So, everything considered, what's the verdict? If Sarah could recover her vocal quality and do better as actress and host, we'd gladly vote the competition a clear.

KC, on the other hand, has to reconsider her once-appeal, work harder on her singing, get over her "bathroom flower" and newly stylish projection—and, most importantly, choose better film projects.

VIEWFINDER

Nestor U. Torre

KC's fans would reply in the clear negative



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5 PUSH
6 VICKY CRISTINA BARCELONA

'Watchmen' too faithful to book

LOS ANGELES—HEY, PATRIOTS. YEAH, you guys, the ones who flooded my inbox with e-mails after I smirked Zack Snyder's "300," wishing birth defects on my unborn children and suggesting that perhaps my husband isn't—ahem—keeping me satisfied.

Yes, I've read "Watchmen." I understand why it matters culturally, why it's considered revolutionary in its exploration of flawed superheroes, why it moved you. It moved me, too. And still...oh, relax: because of that...I found director Snyder's adaptation hugely disappointing. Subbful as it is to the graphic novel.

That right reverence should please purists...stay details from individual comic book panels are recreated lovingly on the big screen—but it also exacerbates to the film's considerable bloat. At almost three hours, "Watchmen" tries to cram in nearly everything writer Alan Moore and illustrator Dave Gibbons originally depicted, but then the ending feels rushed. (And it's slightly different. That's all we'll say.)

HALFA ASSOCIATES/SIX SIGNS/4 in Warner Bros. Pictures'

No-cinematic translation

Much of what made the graphic novel so compelling was the violence of the writing. (Moore wanted no part of the movie, though, so you won't see his name among the credits.) There's a rhythm that sucks you in, with time shifts and overlapping story lines, often within the same panel. There's a richness to the characters, their philosophical debates and characteristic modes.

And there's something powerful about reading those words and intimidating them that doesn't translate cinematically, such as when the tortured Rorschach says in voice-over the same thing he wrote in his journal: "Beneath me, this melted city is screams like an obstacle full of retarded children." The line feels like bad pulp fiction, and like many others, it clangs on the ear when spoken. (David Hayter used this line to wrote the script.)

Twisted version

If you haven't read the book, though, you'll be lost, especially during the opening titles that bounce through the story of the Watchmen's predecessors (to the tune of Bob Dylan's "The Times They Are a Changin'," one of several obvious song choices). There were the Minutemen, mortals who dressed up in capes, leather and listen to fight crime in New York in the 1940s.

Here it's 1985...or, at least, a twisted version of it where Richard Nixon remains president—and members of a new generation of superheroes, the Watchmen, are caught in a murder mystery years after they disbanded.

One of their own, the right-wing military contractor the Comedian (Jeffrey Dean Morgan), has been thrown out the window of his high-rise apartment. It's up to his former colleagues, including Rorschach (an eerie Jackie Earle Haley), the good-guy Nite Owl II (Patrick Wilson), the sexy Silk Spectre II (Malin Akerman), the brilliant Ozymandias (Matthew Goode) and the gruffler Dr Manhattan (Billy Crudup), to find off their get-ups and find out what happened, even as the possibility looms of nuclear annihilation at the hands of the heroes.

Distractingly cartoony

Snyder has been lauded as a visionary director—primarily by the studio releasing the movie—for "300" and "Watchmen" both prove he's really a skilled mimic, albeit one with visual flair. His vision Noir York is tangibly gritty, but at the same time some of his larger set pieces, like the ones that take place on Mars, look distractingly cartoony.

As for the performances, Wilson brings ennui to and pathos to his cuckolded character, while Akerman, as the woman he loves, is no one note. Crudup's scientist is go to seem as the studs and endlessly blue Dr. Manhattan, the only Watchman who really does have superpowers. He's depicted here through motion-capture, his soft voice providing sharp contrast with his character's muscular physique.

Fitty you, because Dr Manhattan's complicated journey is perhaps the breathtaking story that "Watchmen" the novel has to offer.

Glaiza warned against Patrick

Turn to page B4

have gone out to watch movies or visit the malls. "But never just the two of us. He would always bring his friends, or I'd bring mine," Glaiza clarified.

She added that Patrick occasionally goes to her house. "Just only upon the invitation of my elder sister. Secretly. Ate (a parent's title) asked him to join us in one of our Bible study sessions," Glaiza recharge to be a family of "born Again Baptist.

Cool, funny

But does she like Patrick to be her boyfriend?

"I can answer that only if I know him enough," Glaiza answered. "Right now, things are still blurry with him ... But I think Patrick is a cool person. I didn't know he could be funny."

Glaiza has never had a boyfriend. While she gets out on dates, she's not yet ready to commit to anyone. "How long she as gonna," she said. "Commitment entails a lot of risks. I'm not ready for that. I mean I'd eventually fall in love. When I do, I'd be worth the wait."

Why is she cautious with Patrick?

"I know what my friends have gone through, a lot of them split up with their boyfriends in the end, didn't manage! ebeg megkasama," Glaiza explained.

Glaiza starred in a supporting role in the GMA 7 fantasy-e "Engkantadas," which aired its final episode on this 20.

She's also appearing in two indie films—one of which is "8:15," where she plays the main in a blood assassin. It is a project of US-based Filipino filmmakers Dan and Brandon Belarde.

Glaiza is presently shooting "Babaeng Hukluban," director Quark Henares' take on life growing up in the rock scene and his personal experience in forming a band.

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Mourning for FrancisM

Katrina Stuart Santiago
Contributor

IF 1990, I WAS 16 AND LIS-tening to a lot of American pop and rap. But in that age, when my generation needed a homegrown musical idol to look up to, there was FrancisM.

If memory serves, he was singing and dancing on "That's Entertainment," acting in "Bagets 2," and rapping the Top 10 song countdown on "Lovelt Sesa" before he became the country's Master Rapper.

When his biggest breakthrough with his debut album "Isa" and the massive hit "Mga Kabuhayan," it seemed like the most natural progression for someone who apparently had something new and different to say.

Symbol of Pinoy pride

To our soul say IT-proclaimed brother, as well as the many friends who were touched by FrancisM's music, are your hearts—and cry the tears unselfishly shed for loved ones.

He didn't only make Filipinos dance thing we could wear, he also became a symbol of Pinoy pride.

We loved him for being male, in the way that we love the larger symbols of nationhood: The Philippine flag, the color of our skin, the values and principles of our soldiers. Powerful symbols of all of them, with a striking lyrical gift that began with "Mga Kabuhayan."

FIRST PERSON

In that song, he appeared to be more political and rebellious than ever as most Filipino artists.

More daring

He became more daring after that. He dealt with drug abuse ("Mga Praning") squarely in the eye, and brilliantly so, with an interview (or rather, an interrogation) that was rapped about peace and human rights ("Ito Ang Sunto Ko"), the dynamics of Philippine elections ("Halalan"), and even remixed a '70s folk classic ("Ipoy Mga Hoops").

It is difficult to believe that Kiko Dee, and boxing on the first day, it was his song "Magna Cum Nakaw" that sang true for all of us who were angry that the national struggle wasn't ejected. But when more than ultimately to discover that much than politics wasn't about change.

When FrancisM joined "Eat Bulaga!" it was clear that he had matured and become more confident, though still fun-loving. Feeling around with the star, dressing up in drag during special programs, and showing off his wife's household

> The public saw him as a gallant fighter of an ailment that would take his life

chores in a reality-show challenge.

Here too, the public saw him as a family man, and as a gallant fighter of an ailment that would take his life, doing a final performance with good friend Ely Buendia, in a most touching scene and reminders—that while life is volatile and fleeting, it can also be empowered to the love of something we can't control.

Modern-day hero

And as now that FrancisM is gone, I am being reminded, too, of what life was like with his music as my boyhood.

It's difficult not to cry, not just because I have loved this man who was really a stranger, but because this stranger has given so much of himself through his songs.

In that sense I also can't help but mourn. For the country, for hoping but FrancisM as a modern-day hero who had the guts and sense of purpose—traits that have become so rare especially among the current crop of musical artists.

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